



## **A Curator's Representation of Indigenous Peoples**

*National Museums, Cultural Artifacts, and Meaning Making*

Cole, Anne Jodon

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# **A CURATOR'S REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

NATIONAL MUSEUMS, CULTURAL ARTIFACTS, AND  
MEANING MAKING

**BY  
ANNE JODON COLE**

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED 2017



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK





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Anne Jodon Cole



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

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PhD supervisor: Prof. MSO Eva Petersson Brooks  
Aalborg University, DK

Assistant PhD supervisor: Prof. MSO Morten Karnøe Søndergaard  
Aalborg University, DK

PhD committee: Professor mso Kathrin Otrell-Cass  
Aalborg University

Lektor Marianne Achiam  
University of Copenhagen

Ph.d. Robert R. Janes  
Museum Management and Curatorship

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## ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Contemporary Indigenous peoples consider museums as colonial elitist temples. National museums shape knowledge and present cultural and social identities through representation of their collections through visual narratives. Objects chosen for the narratives are selected from the museums' vast collection and provide meaning dependent on how they are framed and linked in exhibitions. The national identities exhibited are created through the relationship museum curators have with the source community. Indigenous researchers suggest the voice of the Indigenous peoples is the one that should be heard in a museum's narratives. The focus of this research was on the voices that influence a *curator's role in the representation* of a nation's Indigenous peoples. The qualitative research examined case studies of three national museums in countries where Indigenous peoples were colonized by settler nations (Australia, New Zealand, and the United States). Two theories provide the theoretical framework. Social Semiotics concept of *semiotic landscape* and the *social landscape* developed in aspects of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The studies showed the dominant voice of influence was heard via the cultural artifacts (museum's mission statement and policies) developed by the museum's governing body: a voice with political implications that influenced the museum's architecture and its use of terminology ("consulting" or "partnering") concerning the involvement of the source community. Both influenced the curators' meaning making process and were reflected in the voices communicated through the narratives in the exhibitions. Parallel research found similar findings in the representation of toys as cultural heritage of children and in the representation of rock art in national museums. A Zone of Mediatonal Knowledge (ZML) was developed with the aim for further research on the dynamics of mediation between curators and source communities, as *figured worlds* promoting learning and meaning. The ZMK provides a means to analyze how museums shape knowledge and create social and cultural identities through their representation of Indigenous people.

# DANSK ABSTRAKT

Indfødte folkeslag betragter i dag nationale museer som kulturelle og historiske kolonibastioner. Nationalmuseer medvirker til at skabe kundskab om og formidling af kulturelle og samfundsmæssige identiteter gennem udstillinger og visuelle fortællinger. Genstande *udvælges* fra omfattende baggrunds samlinger, men ethvert valg påvirker hvorledes udstillinger er påtænkt at *skabe* mening og forståelse, primært gennem hvorledes kulturelle artefakter er placeret i kontekst ('framing') og på hvilken måde de er forbundet ('linked'). I museumsverdenen *skabes* nationalidentitet gennem vekselvirkning mellem kuratorer og de involverede menneskelige kildesamfund. Forskere med indfødt baggrund hævder at det bør være de berørte folkegrupperes egne valg der bestemmer udvælgelse og formidling. Denne afhandling fokuserer på hvilken 'stemme' der påvirker kuratorer i deres valg og udstillingspraksis vedrørende nutidige indfødte minoritetsgrupper og – folk. Til dette formål præsenteres case studies og kvalitative forsknings resultater fra museer i tre nationer der blev til gennem kolonisation: New Zealand, Australien, USA. Afhandlingens teoretiske rammeværk er baseret på begrebet 'semiotiske landskaber' samt CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory). Afhandlingens studier viser at den dominerende 'stemme' udgøres af museernes formål og bestyrelses retningslinjer som nedlagt i fundatser og direktiver – en stemme med til dels klare politiske overtoner. En stemme der påvirker det meste, fra arkitektur og bygningsindretning til hvorledes museer i sin udadvendte rolle omtaler samarbejde med kildesamfund enten som via 'konsulenter' eller mellem 'partnere'. Begge disse opfattelser påvirker kuratorernes valg indenfor rammen af deres egne institutionelle samfund ('figured worlds'), som de fremstår via de realiserede udstillinger og fortællinger. Parallel studier ang. legetøj (opfattet som minoritetsgruppen *børns* kulturelle arv) og helleristninger ("rock art", opfattet som stærkt diakrone interkulturelle kommunikations artefakter fremstillet af minoritetsgrupper ligeledes uden kontemporær udtryksmulighed) leder til tilsvarende konklusioner. Denne afhandling udvikler et nyt begreb ZMK (Zone of Mediatonal Knowledge) med formål at bidrage til uddybning af den dynamiske relation mellem kildesamfund og kurator angående hvorledes kulturelle artefakter (museernes egne formålsdeklarationer o.a.) bidrager til kundskab, læring og forståelse. ZMK's opgave er også at bidrage til en bedre forståelse af hvorledes nationalmuseer varetager deres rolle vedrørende indfødte folkeslags ret til respektfuld og adækvat repræsentation i de nuværende historiske og kulturelle samfund.



# PREFACE

At some point in my adult life, I became interested and intrigued by images found in rock art (*helleristninger* in Danish). From growing up near Chicago and Philadelphia, going to college close to Boston, and later moving to Seattle, I took an interest in heritage preservation of buildings that ended being demolished rather than being restored; it was a similar initial connection with rock art.

On a visit to Hawaii, I visited an area of ancient Ki'i Pōhaku (petroglyphs) situated on Kona coast of the "big island" where I watched tourists walk over the images. They showed little respect for the images or the societal and cultural value they hold for Native Hawaiians. In addition to being disrespectful, walking over the images slowly erodes and destroys them. For Native Hawaiians, the images have spiritual connections, just as they do for Australian Aboriginals, Native Americans in North and South America, Maori in New Zealand, and the San and Khoisan of South Africa. In my interview with a Māori curator from Te Papa, he stated the Māori still have a strong cultural connection with rock art, and it was increasing even though the narratives passed down may not be what was originally intended. I chose this diachronic communication aspect of rock art for my M.A. thesis topic: *Intercultural Communication and Historical Consciousness: A Case for Images from Scandinavian Rock Art* (2009).

My interest in rock art grew further when I learned how to document rock art as a means of preservation for the Scandinavian Society for Prehistoric Art in Underslōs, Tanumshede near the UNESCO World Heritage rock art site in Tanum, Sweden. It was here, locating images hidden on the lichen-covered granite, tracing their shape with my finger, and doing the various stages of documentation that the images took on their own essence. I gained further knowledge about them from "reading" the landscape and learning how the area's geology would have appeared during the Scandinavian Bronze Age (1700- 500 BC), which was much different than today. Additionally, I traveled several times to Valcamonica, in Northern Italy, to learn the history of the images there and any possible connections to Scandinavian rock art. I have also visited rock art sites in the western states of Colorado, Utah, and Washington along with locations on the South Island of New Zealand.

My work and research on rock art led me to look into how, as a form of cultural heritage (intangible and tangible), it was presented in national museums. I wanted to examine *whose* voice and *what* narratives were represented in a national context; were the current custodians, who hold traditional knowledge of the narratives associated, were involved in the process? I was interested in finding out if current societal and environmental issues surrounding the communities that created the rock art were presented from a cultural-historical view and a modern context. Did the narratives accompanying the images convey of the various forms of destruction of



rock art due to modern infrastructure on Indigenous property, or the deterioration caused by climate change and the activity of humans and animals?

Thus, the journey for this thesis began; however, after visiting and talking with curators at The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawara and National Museum of Australia, I found there was little or no representation of rock art, but realized that "something" else was happening. After the long flight from Sydney to Denmark, I could not pinpoint what that "something" was, but it was there. Despite this unsettled feeling, I continued my research. A curator's meaning making remained the central focus of the case studies and the two parallel studies (toy museums and rock art exhibits). Still that "something" nagged me and continued to be a mystery even after the final curator was interviewed at The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI).

While visiting the NMAI, I reflected on my personal background growing up in the United States. I recalled watching TV programs (The Lone Ranger, The Rifleman) along with Western movies with my big brother. I can remember wondering why the programs depicted Native Americans as the not-so-smart enemy when in many instances they seemed to know more about survival than the cowboys. I also recalled how history classes, in my secondary education, rarely presented Native American history. In fact, I do not recall learning about *any* of the people who already had lived in the Americas for thousands (artifacts have been found dating back 30,000 in Chile) of years *before* European settlement. History, according to my schoolbooks, began with the arrival of European Discoverers': Columbus, Cortés, Pizarro, Balboa, Hudson, and de Champlain. In the 1600s settlements were established along the east coast of the United States, and later Lewis and Clark were sent West to explore the wilderness beyond the Mississippi River.

The schoolbooks left out or romanticized the history that actually took place. For example, the romantic notion of Pocahontas, a young Powhatan maiden, who saved the life of Capt. John Smith is the stuff of Disney movies. Smith had a reputation of exaggerating his exploits, and the tale is believed to have derived from a popular Scottish ballad, not actual history. Another popular tale concerns Squanto, a Wampanoag man, who helped the Pilgrims survive their first winter in the Bay Colony of Massachusetts. He spoke English because he had been *kidnapped* and became a *slave* for the Captain of an English ship (*cf.* Nancy Isenberg's 2016 book, *White Trash: the 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*), as were many other Native Americans.

More importantly, history class never presented any links to the current day issues many Native Americans face: the lack sources to acquire an education, employment, and affordable health care, or the ability to obtain adequate housing. Without the proper social framework, the cycle of these issues is hard to break. Rarely, have I heard politicians mention the plight of Native Americans or other marginalized

sections of society; it is not sexy nor does it engage in current populist ideology. Political conversations, for the most part, remain lopsided, pertaining only to the middle and upper class of the dominant white society; thus, the poor, ethnic and religious minorities, and Native Americans continue to be marginalized citizens of the country where “all men are created equal”(2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of United States Declaration of Independence). Currently, similar sentiment is heard in voices around the world; unfortunately, the volume of that voice seems to be increasing in strength based on the results of Presidential and Prime Minister elections worldwide.

Even through my recall of a tainted vision of history, that ‘something’ remained in my mind. It was after several iterations of transcribing the interviews for this thesis and going back through the data collected that that ‘something’ started to take hold. At some point after the final stage of writing had begun, one area became more salient than the others—I had finally figured it out. My decision to focus on the *curator* and not the visitor was the key. That “something” was about the *differences* in curatorial methods in the representation of Indigenous peoples, how the museums presented inclusivity in their policy and mission statement, and how the curators *along with* the source community members were involved in the meaning-making process. It was the great “EUREKA” moment I had been waiting for—finally!



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*This is dedicated to my father, Howard Preston Cole (1920-1973) who taught me the joy and wonder of learning.*







# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TERMINOLOGY .....</b>	<b>XIX</b>
<b>TABLE OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>XXIII</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 PROJECT AIM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND SCOPE .....	4
1.2 RELATED WORK AND PARALLEL STUDIES .....	6
1.3 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	7
1.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	9
1.5 RESULTS, SIGNIFICANCE, AND CONTRIBUTION .....	9
 <b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	 <b>13</b>
2.1 PLACING “MUSEUM” IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT .....	14
2.1.1 IN THE BEGINNING .....	14
2.1.2 LIVING ETHNOGRAPHY .....	16
2.1.3 THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’ .....	17
2.1.4 DEFINING “MUSEUM” .....	18
2.2 THE EVOLVING ROLE OF CURATOR.....	22
2.2.1 EXHIBITION VERSUS EXHIBIT .....	25
2.2.1.1 Defining “Exhibit” .....	27
2.2.2. OBJECTS VERSUS ARATIFACTS.....	28
2.2.3 POST COLONIALISM: DEAD OR ALIVE? .....	31
2.3 CULTURAL HERITAGE AS COMMON DENOMINATOR .....	32
2.3.1 TANGIBLE VERSUS INTANGIBLE .....	33
2.4 AGENTS OF CHANGE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY .....	34
2.5 LOCKING THE PIECES TOGETHER .....	38
 <b>CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....</b>	 <b>41</b>
3.1 FRAMING OF TWO THEORIES .....	41
3.1.1 SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPES .....	43
3.1.1.1 Systems in a Composition .....	46
3.1.1.2 In Summary .....	48
3.1.2 SOCIAL LANDSCAPE .....	48
3.1.2.1 Cultural Artifacts and Mediation .....	49
3.1.2.2 Figured Worlds and Identities .....	49
3.1.2.3 Relational Agency and Relational Expertise .....	51
3.1.2.4 Summing Up .....	52
3.1.3 COMBINING THE TWO THEORIES.....	53
3.1.4 LAYERS OF CONTEXT .....	55

<b>3.2 THE BUILDING'S ARCHITECTURE (L1)</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.3 THE MUSEUM AS AN INSTITUTION (L2)</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.4 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3)</b>	<b>61</b>
3.4.1 A CURATOR'S SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE	62
3.4.2 A CURATOR'S SOCIAL LANDSCAPE	64
3.4.2.1 Summary of L3	67
<b>3.5 THE CURATOR AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4)</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>3.6 SUMMARY</b>	<b>72</b>

<b>CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4.1 AN OVERVIEW</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4.2 EPISTEMOLOGY: WORLDVIEW PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>78</b>
4.3.1 SELECTING AND DELIMITATING THE CASES	80
4.3.2 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	81
4.3.3. MAKING CONNECTIONS	82
<b>4.4 CONSTRUCTION OF DATA COLLECTION</b>	<b>82</b>
4.4.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	83
4.4.2 PHOTOGRAPHY AS VISUAL BASED RESEARCH	84
4.4.3 TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION	86
4.4.3.1 Museum Websites	86
4.4.3.2 Government Documents / Mission Statements	86
<b>4.5 EXAMINATION OF DATA</b>	<b>87</b>
4.5.1 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS (L3)	87
4.5.2 ANALYSIS OF IMAGES: PHOTOGRAPHY (L1, L3)	91
4.5.3 ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION (L2)	94
4.5.4 LINKING DATA (L4)	96
<b>4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>4.6 SUMMARY</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>5.1 THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, (NMAI), Washington D.C., U.S.A.</b>	<b>104</b>
5.1.1 THE ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN (L1)	106
5.1.1.1 The Lady in Native Regalia	106
5.1.1.2 Constructing National Identities	109
5.1.1.3 The Interior Space	110
5.1.2 GOVERNING BODY AND DOCUMENTS (L2)	111
5.1.2.1 Public Law 101-185 November 28, 1989	112
5.1.2.2 A Word from the Directors	113
5.1.2.3 Mission Statement	114
5.1.3 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3)	115

5.1.3.1 Evidence: Overview of an Exhibit.....	115
5.1.3.2 Tangible and Intangible: A Question of Voice .....	122
5.1.4 THE CURATORS AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4) .....	124
5.1.5 IN SUMMARY .....	125
 <b>5.2. THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA (TE PAPA), WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AOTEORO)</b> .....	<b>129</b>
5.2.1 ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN (L1).....	131
5.2.2 GOVERNING BODY AND DOCUMENTS (L2) .....	133
5.2.2.1 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992.....	133
5.2.2.2 Governance and Management.....	135
5.2.2.3 Bicultural Policy .....	135
5.2.2.4 Mission Statement.....	137
5.2.2.5 Mana Taonga .....	137
5.2.2.6 Mātauranga Māori .....	138
5.2.3 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3).....	139
5.2.3.1 A Place for Coming Together .....	142
5.2.4 THE CURATOR AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4).....	145
5.2.5 SUMMARY .....	146
 <b>5.3. CASE STUDY: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA (NMA)</b> .....	<b>149</b>
5.3.1 ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN (L1).....	151
5.3.1.2 Exhibition Space Design .....	153
5.3.2. GOVERNING BODY AND DOCUMENTS (L2) .....	155
5.3.2.1. The Pigott Inquiry (1975).....	155
5.3.2.2 National Museum of Australia Act (1980).....	156
5.3.2.3 Organization of NMA .....	156
5.3.2.4 The “Review” or Carroll Report (2003) .....	157
5.3.2.5 Mission Statement.....	159
5.3.3 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (A3) .....	159
5.3.4 THE CURATORS AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4) .....	164
5.3.5 SUMMARY .....	166
 <b>CHAPTER 6: TOYS, STOLEN GENERATIONS, AND ROCK ART</b> .....	<b>171</b>
<b>OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 1</b> .....	<b>173</b>
TOY STORY: CHILDREN VERSUS CHILDHOOD IN TOY MUSEUMS....	175
<b>Article 2</b> .....	<b>201</b>
<b>OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 2</b> .....	<b>202</b>
INCLUSIVE INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN VOICES IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE .....	203

<b>Article 3 .....</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>OVERVIEW FOR ARTICLE 3 .....</b>	<b>226</b>
NATIONAL MUSEUM'S REPRESENTATION OF ROCK ART: BEYOND FIELDWORK AND DOCUMENTATION .....	227
 <b>CHAPTER 7: CROSS-COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>7.1 INFLUENCE OF THE GOVERNING BODY .....</b>	<b>240</b>
7.1.1 MASTER IDENTITIES .....	241
7.1.2 SETTING THE TONE .....	242
7.1.3 REFLECTION OF NATION .....	244
7.1.4 SUMMARY .....	246
<b>7.2 CURATORIAL APPROACHES .....</b>	<b>247</b>
7.2.1 THE CURATOR'S ROLE AND AUDIENCE .....	247
7.2.2 A QUESTION OF EXPERTISE .....	248
7.2.3 INDIGENOUS OR COMMUNITY CURATION .....	250
<b>7.3 SOURCE COMMUNITIES .....</b>	<b>252</b>
7.3.1 TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS .....	254
7.3.1.1 Parallels in Ways of Knowing .....	256
7.3.2 SUMMARY .....	257
<b>7.4 PROVIDING A BALANCE OF VOICES .....</b>	<b>258</b>
7.4.1 A CHOICE OF TERMINOLOGY .....	259
7.4.2 NARRATIVES AND AUDIENCE .....	262
7.4.3 STATUS QUO OR EMPOWERMENT .....	263
7.4.4 ZONE OF MEDIATING KNOWLEDGE (ZMK) .....	265
<b>7.5 IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>269</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>8.1 PLACING THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>8.2 ACHIEVING THE AIM AND ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>275</b>
8.2.1 THE "FIGURED WORLD" OF THE CURATOR .....	275
8.2.2 A QUESTION OF TERMINOLOGY .....	276
8.2.3 A QUESTION OF NARRATIVES AND AUDIENCE .....	277
8.2.4 THE ROAD TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND EMPOWERMENT .....	278
<b>8.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>8.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>8.5 MOVING FORWARD .....</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>LITERATURE LIST .....</b>	<b>281</b>

# TERMINOLOGY

**MĀORI TERMS** (definitions from Māori Dictionary online  
<http://maoridictionary.co.nz> exception noted with \*)

**Aotearoa:** North Island, now all of New Zealand.

**Hapū:** Kinship group, clan, tribe, sub-tribe - section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society.

**Iwi:** extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race—often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.

**Mana tangata:** power and status accrued through one's leadership talents, human rights, mana of people.

**Marae:** courtyard-the open area in front of the wharenui, where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often used to include the complex of buildings around the *marae*.

**Mātaranga Māori:** Māori knowledge- the body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world-view and perspectives, Maori creativity and cultural practices.

**Moriori:** the Indigenous peoples of the Chatham Islands 800 kilometers east of the mainland of New Zealand, descendent from the same Polynesians settlers as the Māori.

**Papatua:** uncultivated, unfarmed,

**Pākehā:** English, foreign, European, exotic - introduced from a foreign country.

**Pounamu:** greenstone, jade (New Zealand nephrite)

**Tangata tiriti:** 'people of the treaty', those who live in NZ by right of the Treaty.

**Tangata whenua:** local people, Indigenous people- people born of the *whenua*, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta is buried.

**Taonga:** treasure, anything prized – applied to anything considered to be of value including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomenon, ideas and techniques.

**Tino rangatiratanga\*:** phrase in the Māori text of the Treaty of Waitangi meaning absolute chieftainship or authority, today it refers more to aspiration for self-determination (C. McCarthy, 2011).

**Waka:** canoe, vessel, container.

**Whakapapa:** refers to genealogy, lineage, descent- reciting whakapapa is an important skill and reflects the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.

**Whānau:** extended family, a familiar term to address a number of people- their primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. Modern use the term is used to include friends who may not have kinship ties to other members.

**Rangatiratanga:** 1. chieftainship, 2. kingdom, self-determination.

# ABBREVIATIONS

ATSIP: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Program, the *First Australians* galleries curatorial team.

ICHC: Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>

ICOM: The International Council of Museums  
<http://icom.museum>

ICOFOM: The International Committee for Museology  
<http://network.icom.museum/icofom>

ILO: International Labour Organization  
<http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>

ISAM: Iziko South African Museum, Cape Town, ZA.  
<http://www.iziko.org.za/museums/south-african-museum>

NAGPRA: Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (under the U.S. Department of Interior). <http://www.usbr.gov/nagpra/>

NMA: National Museum of Australia  
<http://www.nma.gov.au>

NMAI: National Museum of the American Indian  
<http://www.nmai.si.edu>

OHCHR: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/Home.aspx>

TE PAPA: Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongarewa*  
<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/pages/home.aspx>

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
<http://en.unesco.org>





# LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 2.1 Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities.....	15
Figure 2.2 Dimensions of social exclusion .....	35
Figure 2.3 Current forces against change in museum sectors .....	37

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Figure 3.1 The basic meditational triangle for L3 .....	65
Figure 3.2 The basic meditational triangle for L4 .....	71

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Figure 4.1 Qualitative Research Design.....	77
Figure 4.2 Specific Design of Dissertation .....	81
Figure 4.3 Two Levels of Inference.....	82
Table 4.1 Qualitative Overview.....	88
Figure 4.4 A Sample of the Transcript.....	88
Figure 4.5 Analysis of Interviews.....	90
Figure 4.6 Analysis of Images.....	91
Figure 4.7 Analysis of an Exhibit .....	93
Figure 4.8 Analysis of Textual Documentation .....	97
Figure 4.9 Analysis of Linked Data.....	98
Figure 4.10 Influences in the Research Design .....	100

## CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDIES

### 5.1 THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, (NMAI)

Figure 5.1.1. The Entrance of the NMAI.....	107
Figure 5.1.2 Grandfather Rocks and wetlands.....	108
Figure 5.1.3 The Interior Space:.....	110

Figure 5.1.4 Layout of “Our Peoples” gallery. ....	116
Figure 5.1.5 The Gold Wall. ....	118
Figure 5.1.6 “Making History” Exhibit. ....	120
Figure 5.1.7 “All My Relations.”. ....	121

## 5.2. THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA

Figure 5.2.1 The Main Entrance. ....	130
Figure 5.2.2 Te Papa’s Logo and Main Entrance. ....	132
Figure 5.2.3 Moriori Exhibit ....	140
Figure 5.2.4 Māui, on top of the Wharenui. ....	143
Figure 5.2.5 The Stained glass door and the Wahaora. ....	144

## 5.3. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA (NMA)

Figure 5.3.1 Entrance to NMA. ....	152
Figure 5. 3. 2 Interior of Main Entrance ....	154
Figure 5.3.3 The Welcome Hall. ....	161
Figure 5.3.4 Juxtaposed walls. ....	162

## CHAPTER 6: TOYS, STOLEN GENERATIONS, & ROCK ART

### Article 1: Toy Story: Children Versus Childhood In Toy Museums

Figures 1 and 2 Exterior of Museums ....	181
Figure 3 Mapping of <i>Den Gamle By</i> . ....	183
Figure 4 “Wow, it’s a CD player!” ....	185
Figure 5 The ‘Girls’ Exhibit at <i>Den Gamle By</i> . ....	186
Figure 6 Mapping of Leksaksmuseet ....	189
Figure 7 LEGO section. ....	190
Figure 8 Vroom Vroom car exhibits. ....	193

### Article 2: Inclusive Indigenous Australian Vocies in the Museum of Australia's Semitoic Landscape

Figure 1 Lower level with ‘Off the Walls’ ....	208
Figure 2 ‘Off the Walls’ front case exhibit. ....	209

Figure 3 Link-Up Exhibit..	213
Figure 4 Close-up of Peta’s artwork.	216

## CHAPTER 7: CROSS-COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

Table 7.1 Social Language of the three figured worlds .....	259
Figure 7.1 Zone of Mediating Knowledge (ZMK).....	266



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Rārangi maunga tū te ao, tū te pō; rārangi tangata ka ngaro, ka ngaro.*

*A rang Rārangi maunga tū te ao, tū te pō; rārangi tangata ka ngaro, ka ngaro.*

*A range of mountains stands day in and day out, but a line of people is lost, is lost.*

*Māori proverb<sup>1</sup>*

The years 1492, 1769, and 1788 were the dates when many Indigenous peoples living in the Americas and Australasia encountered Europeans, which ended up having a devastating effect on their societies. Indigenous people were "deprived of vast landholdings and access to life-sustaining resources and they have suffered historical forces that have actively suppressed their political and cultural institutions" (Anaya, 2004, p. 4). Many centuries' later, many Indigenous peoples continue to exist in conditions that placed them at a disadvantage and are "on the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder" (Anaya, 2004, p. 4).

Collectively, the term *Indigenous Peoples* identifies these different groups of peoples. In the 2004 book, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law*, S. James Anaya (Apache and Purépecha), a professor of Human Rights Law and Policy, suggests the term 'Indigenous peoples':

*... refers to a particular subset of humanity that represents a certain common set of experiences rooted in historical subjugation by colonialism or something like colonialism. Today Indigenous peoples are identified and identify themselves as such by reference to identities that predate historical encroachment by other groups and the ensuing histories they wrought and continue to bring. . . . They are indigenous because their ancestral roots are embedded in the lands in which they now live, or would like to live. They are peoples to the extent they comprise distinct communities with continuity of existence and identity that links them to communities, tribes or nations of their ancestral past (pp. 4-5).*

Māori researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) suggests the term, *Indigenous peoples*, evolved in the 1970s during the American Indian Movement (AIM) and Canadian Indian Brotherhood. The 's' at the end of peoples, was argued for by various Indigenous activists due to the right of self-determination, and as a way to recognize the differences between various Indigenous peoples along with the terms First Nations, Native Peoples, and Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders<sup>2</sup>. The term Indigenous peoples is used within this thesis and is

interspersed with the term 'source community' as implications are similar for other marginalized communities, i.e., children, migrants, and immigrants.

The degree that national museums allow politics (and politicians) to influence who sits on their boards provides implications for the wording of their mission statement, internal policies, and the message sent to the public through its exhibitions (Bunch, 1992). Lonnie Bunch (1992), the Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (Smithsonian), referred to museums as struggling to have "the appropriateness of certain cultural canons" which brought on the examination of museum exhibitions (p. 63). He suggested, museums worried that controversial exhibitions may have a detrimental effect on funding, relationships with the board, government agencies, and the public (p.63). Museum practitioners have the choice to present narratives that play it safe or challenge the status quo by raising diverse voices where voices that have remained silent are heard. The article was written in 1992, yet the case studies in this thesis will show similar concerns still exist.

Thus, how a museum, as a social institution, chooses to be inclusive of Indigenous communities may have a correlation to the Western ideology that established them centuries ago. Museums were established at a time when societies' elite collected and exhibited objects of "Others" as commodities or trophies without knowledge of their intrinsic value before the movement of 'new museology' (Vergo, 1989). Other museum practitioners extended inclusive ideology in the development of 'post-museum' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a, 2007), 'appropriate museology' (Kreps, 2008, 2015), and 'new museum ethics' (Marstine, 2011). Further, shifts in museology highlighted social responsibility in conjunction with inclusivism (Sandell, 2002, 2003; Sandell and Nightingale, 2012). Due to these various approaches, curatorial methods began to cross cultural boundaries and work collectively with the cultures represented to perceive meaning from the source community's point of view. Thus, a change in mindset began to take place on how different cultural identities are represented. The questions remains, whose identity is presented in exhibition narratives and by whom?

Museums identities are established by more than the objects in their collection. It also is conveyed through the social construction of the building and the spatial considerations of the galleries inside. In writing about national identities, Sharon Macdonald (2003) coupled the classical building design of the nineteenth century with the objectification of culture through the objects collected and then exhibited: a notion she argues is "central to Western conceptions of identity"(p. 3). Museums also create identities through the relationships and associations of cultural objects implemented by the museums' curators to represent cultures and social identities (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). While curators are not directly involved with this element of the design, the outcome has implications for the spatial and informative relationship between the various exhibitions. The objects remain fixed as mere



“collection” pieces as before new museology if the museum’s curators continue to understand them outside the realm of the originating culture (Macdonald, 2003).

Philip Cash Cash (Cayuse and Nez Pierce) views curating as a “social practice predicated on a fixed relation between material objects and the human environment” (2001, p.140). “Fixed” suggests specific societies have a certain way of viewing, and placing meaning on objects and firmly puts curation in such a cultural context (Krebs, 2003). Thus, there are two distinct knowledge systems and social practices dependent on whether a curator is Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Kreps (1998, 2003, 2008, 2010) has promoted the value of “Indigenous curation” and “Indigenous museological traditions” as has Cash Cash (2001). He suggests the term brings new dimensions “of human potential and experience that is a testimony to the immediacy, vitality, and power of objects to mediate the lived, everyday world we have now come to share” (p. 144). Incorporating the term would entail museums to change from top-down structure to a more “bottom-up approach that allows museums to combine local knowledge and resources” (Krebs, 2008, p. 26) to develop a more inclusive museum practice: such procedures entail change.

Change is a process that is “exciting, messy, and stressful” and needs the support and motivation of the majority of the board to provide socio-political agendas that will increase the museum level of social responsibility (Sandell, 2003, p.58). Robert R. Janes and the late Gerald Conaty (2005) indicated, “Museums are the products of the society they support” (p.1). They question what would happen if museums were assessed by the *social capital* they generate (p.5). I suggest the degree a museum involves the source community corresponds to providing an *accurate* representation. It becomes an aspect of an assessment that cannot be examined solely on the narratives presented, but needs to include the organizational culture behind them. If we bring in organizational culture research, a museums’ identity is in constant flux through the “recursive relationships between the agentic actor, possibilities for action, the impact of the actions, and the feedback on the actions”(Edwards, 2015, p. 782). In other words, an assessment of a museums’ social capital needs to examine the interplay of relationships between the various actors, their actions and the response of such actions. Thus, it may be possible to analyze whether a museum advocates a top-down or bottom-up organizational structure and how that affects its social capital.

National museums, in particular, need to be sensitive to the complexities of representing cultural identities (Macdonald, 1998; Cash Cash, 2001; Lonetree, 2012; Kreps, 2008, 2015; Marstine, 2011; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013). Preservation and understanding of the cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples can only come through sensitive and accurate representation. Traditional knowledge systems, such as the passing down of oral histories, embrace intangible heritage, which is not always a known entity. Thus, collaborating with representatives of the source community should be an active part of the curating process. Such

collaboration would be in compliance with International Committee on Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics for Museums: "museums should ensure that the information they present in displays and exhibitions is well founded, accurate and give appropriate consideration to represented groups or beliefs (2013, Item 4.2, p. 8).

Rhiannon Mason (2005) points out an important aspect regarding meaning making, which emphasizes the need to collaborate with source communities. She suggests:

*. . . meaning is not fixed within objects, images, historical resources, or cultural sites, but it is produced out of the combination of the object / the image / the site itself, the mode of presentation, what is known about its history and production . . . (p. 203).*

Based on this, the curator is at the center of meaning production. It involves his/her professional knowledge, ethics influenced by his or her personal socio-cultural background, the museum's collection, and its physical space. If 'what is known' is merely from *just* the curator's view it is doubtful the artifact's complete history is known. In the representation of Indigenous peoples, a curator needs to step back from their cultural context and consider the context and history of artifact though the knowledge of the source community.

Similarly, working on this research, I also needed to consider how my cultural context as a born and bred United States citizen who has lived in Denmark for many years influenced my objectivity. Additionally, I had to consider the fact that I am an outsider to the society of museum practitioners and Indigenous peoples culture.

The following sections provide a brief overview of the thesis from its aim research questions, and scope (1.1), to related works (1.2), theoretical and methodological framework (1.3), and, findings and contribution to the field (1.4).

## **1.1 PROJECT AIM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, & SCOPE**

The title of this thesis, *A Curator's Representation of Indigenous Peoples: National Museums, Cultural Artifacts, Meaning Making* stresses the scope where the *curator* takes center stage in the process of making meaning of the nation's history and the history of the people represented. The *aim* is to understand the various *voices* that influence the *curator's* process of meaning making when representing a nation's Indigenous peoples. The research questions are:

**RQ1:** How does a curator define his or her role?

**RQ2:** What terms are used in the museum's governing acts, policy, and mission statement? How does the language influence the curator's meaning making process?

**RQ3:** How are exhibit narratives presented, and who is the curator's intended audience?

**RQ4:** What narratives are presented in the exhibitions? Do the exhibits provide a voice for a nation's Indigenous peoples or one that is more Eurocentric?

The scope of this research centers on the *curator*; thus, they were the only museum practitioners interviewed. The aim of this thesis specifically chose not to focus on visitor research, as the concern focused on the production of meaning making *for an exhibition*. I view this study and visitor studies as different sides of the same coin—neither one being more important than the other but both attempting to understand the motivation for learning within the context of a museum. In addition to learning, research on visitor studies vary from the museum experience as an approach (Falk and Dierkling, 2000, 2013), to retaining attention (Bitgood, 2013), and gaining a diverse public (Golding and Modest, 2013). I view the process of how visitors learn as being intrinsically tied to the overall process of meaning making—this thesis focuses on the influences that affect the meditated action that takes place between the curators with source community members *and* in turn the actual execution of the exhibit.

Additionally, this thesis did not involve members of the source community who acted as either consultants or partners with the museum curators in creating an exhibition. It was a conscious decision to have information specifically from the curator. Their 'voice' was the foci of the research. As the scope of the thesis changed, the depth of the research did not allow time to provide a full breadth of interviews across the different practices within each museum. However, the discussion and concluding remarks (Chapters Seven and Eight) suggests future research would be more holistic if it incorporated interviews with the source communities and other practitioners that have influence on a curator's meaning making process (Korn, 2007).

This research concludes with the development of a tool for analyzing who or what influences a curator's meaning making process. In turn, it also functions as a device to analyze the museum's level of social capital regarding the diverse communities it serves, and a learning tool between museum practitioners and source communities to assess the process and outcome of an exhibition project.

## 1.2 RELATED WORK AND PARALLEL STUDIES

During this research, several searches for similar Ph.D. research on ProQuest found no dissertations with the phrases 'Indigenous curation', 'Indigenous representation,' or 'national museums' in the title or abstracts. Most research concentrated on regional Indigenous museums, repatriation issues, and Indigenous art. Two recent PhDs focused on Indigenous peoples and museums in other contexts. *Building of a Nation: Chickasaw museums and construction of Chickasaw history and heritage* (Gorman, 2009) researched how the Chickasaw Nation uses museums and heritage sites as places to define itself as a legitimate contemporary Nation. In 2013 Kaila Cogdill's presented her work titled, *Looking forward rather than backward: Cultural revitalization at the Poeh Cultural Center and Museum*, where she examined the role of the museum in aiding the recovery of the identity of the Pueblo of Pojoaque culture and art, while also strengthening its economics, and social status.

Several people in the field of museum studies have written articles reflecting the role of curator's meaning-making process to various degrees. One example, 'Heterotopic Dissonance in the Museums Representation of Pacific Island Cultures' (Miriam Kahn, 1995) discusses the need for museums to facilitate the expertise of others in their exhibitions to break down cultural stereotypes. It provides a discussion, which followed shortly after the conception of 'new museology' and 'post-museum.' 'Interpreting the New Museology' (Max Ross, 2004), presents five curators from one region in England were interviewed to investigate to what degree they shifted their attention from the collections to the *visitors*. A further example, Stephanie Lambert (2009) explored the strategic use of narratives by curators at Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongarewa* providing insight into how a bi-cultural team develops exhibits.

Archaeologists have researched the role of curators in such, 'Interpretation in Rock Art and Folklore: Communication Systems in Evolutionary Perspective' (Biesle, 1983) who comments on how misrepresentation can perpetuate stereotypes. Laurajane Smith (2004) wrote on heritage as a cultural process of meaning and memory making, and highlights archaeologists' recognition of fundamental connections between their practice and 'descendent communities' demands for credibility. Many curators have a background in archaeology, so the above considerations are also essential for museum curators. Several researchers were instrumental in providing a framework for understanding implications of social responsibility in museums from different angles (Sandell, 2002, 2003, 2007; Janes (2010, 2013; Janes and Conaty, 2005). Their research silenced concerns I had that this thesis had turned too political. A different angle on social and political aspects was found in the research of Christina Kreps on Indigenous curation (1998, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2015).

Parallel studies are represented in two articles (1 and 3) presented in Chapter Six. The first focused on the marginalization of children and the representation of toys in toy museums (Sharon Brookshaw, 2009; Darien-Smith and Pascoe, 2013; and Davey, Darien-Smith and Pascoe, 2013). Two museums were investigated: *Den Gamle By*, Aarhus, DK and *Leksaksmuseet*, Stockholm, SE (Article One). The article provides an interesting parallel to the representation of Indigenous artifacts. The research suggested adults not only create toys for children, but they choose how 'toys' are represented as part of childhood, which is not so different from curators' representation of Indigenous peoples. The article provides a background to answer all four-research questions with the last question related to children as a marginalized segment of the population.

A second parallel study investigated the representation of rock art in a national museum context. The museums presented in the article are the Iziko South African Museum, Cape Town, ZA, National Museum of Australia, and Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongarewa* (Article Three). The article echo's similar concerns as Article One on the contextual representation of cultural artifacts. It also provides an additional context to answer all four research questions.

The common link between the parallel studies to the initial study is concepts of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, marginalization, social responsibility, and who is representing whom. A third article on *Indigenous Voices* (Article Two) follows a similar discussion on representation through an in-depth examination of two exhibits with political undertones at the National Museum of Australia. The article provides an extension to the case study discussion of the same museum.

### 1.3 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To answer the research questions aspects of two theories were used: social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) formulated from the work of Lev Vygotsky. Four layers were developed from the data collected: (L1) Buildings Architecture (interior and exterior); (L2) The Museum as an Institution (policies and governing acts); (L3) Curators as Exhibitors; and (L4) Curators and Source Communities. The two theories provide interrelationship between the semiotic landscape and social landscapes of the various layers and how they influence the narratives provided by the curator. The development of the layers is explained in Section 3.1.4 in the Theoretical Considerations.

Museums as institutions provide learning through a variety of images/symbols (visual grammar): therefore, they provide an opportunity to use social semiotics theory of representation (van Leeuwen, 2005; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress, 2001). The premise behind the theory is that the production of signs needs to be

understood from a social context and that communication takes place in social structures that are inevitably marked by power differences (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p.13). The framework places emphasis on *semiotic landscapes* and how representational and interactive meanings of images are related to each other (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). It suggests the visual component or composition of a landscape is an independently organized and structured message connected to the text but not dependent on it (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Vectorial patterns or narratives form the connections. Narratives refer to the *patterns of representation* that “serve to present unfolding actions, events, and processes of change in spatial arrangements” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 59), such as overall exhibition space or details within an exhibit. Van Leeuwen (2005) further states social semiotics attempts to combine the synchronic and diachronic narratives: joining what has happened historically with a “freeze frame” of a given moment (p. 26). Thus, they *frame* and *link* the overall *composition* of the landscape’s design: the colors, sound, textures, spatial placement and related context of items in proximity to one another place a central function on the curator’s meaning making process. Political *narratives* can be signified by the museum’s architecture, the location of Indigenous galleries along with positioning between the exhibition spaces. Specific compositional aspects within exhibits were reviewed to understand what narratives were represented, by whom and for whom. The concept of semiotic landscape was applied to layers L1 and L3.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) evolved from a focus on the individual mind and collective action (Edwards, 2005a, p. 170); it provides a bridge between sociocultural psychology (Cole, 1996) and activity theory (Engeström, 1999) and looks at the museum’s *social landscape*. The bridge between them centers on Vygotsky’s work on the process of *mediation* and how *cultural artifacts* help people negotiate and achieve a shared common outcome. CHAT has three core ideas central to Vygotsky’s work: (1) humans act collectively, learning and communication take place via their actions; (2) community is central to the process of making and interpreting meaning, which reflects on learning; and (3) humans develop, use, and manipulate tools (concrete and abstract) to learn and communicate (Vygotsky, 1978). These three ideas are central to this thesis. CHAT provides a means to understand how a curator’s action is mediated by knowledge and language that is culturally situated. It provides a means to understand the *multivoices* (Wertsch, 1991) of influence on how a curator represents a source community. Thus, the theory allows for the consideration of distinct social and cultural constructs as having their own *social language* (Bakhtin, 1986). Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) call these constructs, “as-if” *figured world* (p. 55). This concept is applied to layers L2, L3, and L4.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical application of the two theories in detail.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The key methods for this empirical research were qualitative with semi-formal recorded and transcribed interviews with curators, photographing and mapping of the exhibits, and textual data (government documents, mission statements, the museum's website). Data analysis incorporated theoretical concepts of the social and semiotic landscape. The concept of social language was used to analyze the comments made by the curators (L3) and the words chosen by the governing body in the mission and policy of the museum (L2). Images were analyzed by the coherence of the compositional systems used in the museum's semiotic landscape (L1, L3). The role of the source community (L4) was analyzed from linking the aforementioned analysis together and with the ethical consideration of Indigenous methodology. The database provided a qualitative insight on the similarities and differences in the approaches taken by museum curators. Analysis revealed three themes emerged from the four layers, and then were narrowed down to one salient theme. The *three main case studies* included in the research are:

- National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra, AUS.
- Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongarewa* (Te Papa), Wellington, NZ.
- Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

The complete methodological considerations are presented in Chapter Four.

## 1.5 RESULTS, SIGNIFICANCE & CONTRIBUTION

The key finding centers on the voice of the museum as institution, its governing body set the tone for the terminology used in policies and mission statements that in turn have implications for the building's design, narratives curators provide, and relationships with source communities. While many of the narratives presented initiated the process of inclusivity, there still seems to be an overall lack of courage to be more critical of past injustices and their continued effect on the Indigenous peoples role within society today.

Providing a cross-comparative study investigating the representation of Indigenous peoples in three inter-national museums is distinct. In doing so, it allows for an understanding of the different curatorial methods at each museum and to see the distinctions between different cultures; therefore, it also provides insight into the meaning making process. The development of concepts of 'Indigenous curation', 'Indigenous curatorial museology' and 'community curation' all suggest change is

moving towards providing inclusive representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples.

The use of the concept of '*semiotic landscape*' emphasizes how meaning is made through the curator's decisions of how an object is placed in an exhibition composition and the narratives associated with it. Whether a source community is involved in the curatorial process or not suggests different compositional and narrative outcomes. The *semiotic landscape* refers to the architects' choices for the building's design, which provides the first impression of the museum. The physical structure's design has implications for how the curators are able to use the space and the "reading pathway" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) created between exhibitions. The semiotic landscape was analyzed through observations and photographs of the systems of *composition* (*salience, information value, and framing*).

The museum's social landscape used the theoretical framework of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) to analyze the relationship between the agents (curators, governing body, source community) and their mediation of cultural tools: something that is missing from social semiotics (Gilje, 2008). The term "figured worlds" (Holland, et al., 1998), this pertains to conceptual worlds that are, "socio-historic contrived interpretations that mediate behavior and inform participants outcomes?" The intent of placing the three layers as *figured worlds* is to view each (governing body, curator, source community) as a separate entity with their own language, expertise, values, and meaning making tools. The concepts from CHAT (*multivoicedness, mediation, relational agency*) filled a gap and allowed for analytical considerations for how the social language used by the museum *and* by the curator influenced how a how a source community is represented in the museum's *social landscape*.

The two theories combined provide a more holistic view (Korn, 2007) of what influences a curator's meaning making process involving both compositional aspects *and* the mediated action that takes place between the curators and the source community. Both theories delve into communication processes: one visually and one through multivoicedness of social language.

Chapter Seven provides a *Cross-comparative Discussion* of the various cases including those used in the articles. Chapter Eight provides *Concluding Comments* of the thesis. The thesis ends with the *Literature List* (APA format); a compilation of all the works *cited* in the monograph portion of the thesis. The article references are only referenced at the end of each article *unless* information from the article was brought into the monograph of the thesis. In that instance, those citations were incorporated in the Literature List. The thesis is written in American English, except where quotes are provided by authors using British English.



**ENDNOTES**

1. "A range of mountains stands day in and day out, but a line of people is lost, is lost." For Sidney Moko Mead (1984), the Māori proverb refers to the art of the ancestors that has been lost to fire, destroyed by animals, hidden in burial caves, or left to rot. He believes that art collections can be "likened to a range of mountains, thanks to the Western practice of collecting pieces of art and modern conservative techniques" (p. 20). The artwork remains long after it was created. Many images made thousands of years ago are still present. The artists and their ideas, their worlds, their cultural practices have disappeared forever (*rārangi tangata ka ngaro, ka ngaro*). Mead comments that the "mountains are part of the landscape, they are reference points, and they possess cultural meaning" (p. 20).

2. The term Indigenous, Aboriginal, Aborigines, Indian all can suggest negative connotations. Throughout the thesis, I have chosen to use the term *Indigenous peoples* to as a collective term that encompasses all the various cultural groups mentioned within this study. By no means does the author place all Indigenous people into one category, as there are many sub-groups within Māori, Aboriginal peoples of Australia, Torres Strait Islanders, Native Americans, and First Nations, etc., each group has a culture and heritage that is theirs alone. Thus, the *Murri* people from Queensland and the *Koori* people from New South Wales (Australia) may share some cultural similarities while having distinct cultural differences. When the specific tribe, iwi, nation, or clan affiliation of a person is placed in parenthesis after the person's name is first mentioned.



# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through.  
Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we  
return home.*  
*Australian Aboriginal Proverb<sup>1</sup>*

The literature review started in the fall of 2010, and after numerous iterations, salient themes developed and changed. Coming from a background in general science (AS), American literature and advertising design (BA), and intercultural communication (MA), my initial step was scanning as much information as possible to devise key areas that would allow maximum competence to complete this research. Recounting that process and the twists and turns it took was an exercise worthy of a Ph.D. in and of itself: a process that was similar to finding all the framing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The literature review covers four areas that frame the research in terms to understand the levels of complexity in a curator's development of meaning-making in exhibits related to the representation of Indigenous peoples, related to the research questions (RQ):

**Section 2.1** provides an overview of the historical context of museums, organizational guidelines for museums, and defining the term *museum*. The information correlates to research question one as it pertains to the how the curator defines his or her role and question two as it regards discourses that may influence the narratives curators present (RQ1, RQ2).

**Section 2.2** provides research on the evolving role of curator, exhibition vs. exhibit, and different forms of meaning making. It aims to answer research questions one and three about the semiotic landscape of the exhibition. It begins to touch on inquiries to answer question four related to communication between curators and the source communities they represent (RQ1, RQ3, RQ4).

**Section 2.3** provides an extension on forms of meaning making covered in 2.2 where the focus turns to tangible and intangible cultural heritage; this adds to answering questions two, three, and four where it relates to the value and form of relationship curators have with source communities (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4).

**Section 2.4** provides background to understand the framework of museums increasing their role in being more socially responsible as it relates to the narratives presented and working with source communities; this provides a means to answer questions two and four (RQ2, RQ4).

Combined these topics provide a historical context to comprehend the complex and various voices (spatial, institutional, political, sociocultural, and source community) involved in curators presentation of Indigenous peoples. The relevance of the research questions as they pertain to each section is discussed at the beginning of the section. In most instances, the section has relevance to more than one question.

## **2.1 PLACING “MUSEUM” IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The degree of interaction curators have with source communities, and the level of political sway on the museum may have a link to the historical narratives national museum provide. A historical overview of museums provides a starting point. Museums began in a time when society's elite collected and exhibited objects of 'Others' as commodities or trophies without knowing their intrinsic value. More recently moves towards a shift to concepts of the 'New Museology' (Vergo, 1989), 'post-museum' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a, 2007), and "new museum ethics" (Marstine, 2011). Museology began to provide more focus on issues of social responsibility and inclusivity of "Others," which in turn called for museums to collaborate with source communities in the representations of their cultural artifacts. The historical overview shows how the 'museum' has developed from being thought of as a temple to one of an open forum. What if any link is there between how a museum defines itself through its mission statement (RQ2) and the how the curator sees his or her role (RQ1) and relationship with the source communities? (RQ 4).

### **2.1.1 IN THE BEGINNING**

In 1565, Samuel Quiccheberg established the first treatise on museums in an attempt to outline why the desire to create curiosity cabinets was so prominent in European culture (Meadow and Robertson, 2013). Quiccheberg imagined a *Wunderkammer* (curiosity cabinet) as being a practical way of organizing and collecting objects for their usefulness. He realized that their juxtaposition to one another could enhance or detract the value of any one object and that lighting could play a role in that value (Meadow and Robertson, 2013). They suggest Quiccheberg understood, "one object is silent, two tell a story; and three tell multiple stories and must be approached with a sense of order, with a theory in mind" (p.13). Therefore, the production of knowledge that is not passive, but based on the knowledge of the viewer. Quiccheberg chose to house the collection in a complex devoted to research, collecting, and display. Modern day examples of this concept are the Smithsonian Institution on the Mall in Washington, D.C.; Museum Island in Berlin, Germany; and South Kensington in London.

The Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Museum Age, (1650s-1780s) saw more collections become 'cabinets of curiosities' curated by the owner. Ole Worm's collection provides an example. Worm was a 17th-century naturalist, antiquarian, and collector who set up one of the first 'cabinets of curiosities' in Copenhagen (Fig. 2.1). Later, "grand museums" (Hendry, 2005, p. 31) developed from the collections of the elite. The objects in them became *curiosities* of far away people and places, which put the objects in a representational system that framed a particular aspect of the world: A world of the 'Other' (Hendry, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 2007; Kratz and Karp, 2007). Museumgoers shared the same class as the collectors, but could only get admittance via written request: The general public was excluded (Bennett, 1995). By the 1830s, it began to be more widely accepted to include a wider portion of the public and by doing so would deliver social benefits (Sandell, 1998). National museums established based on the "princely or private collections," and expanded through "colonial expansion, imperial plunder, and further "elite, industrial, and state patronage"(Kratz and Karp, 2007, p.3).

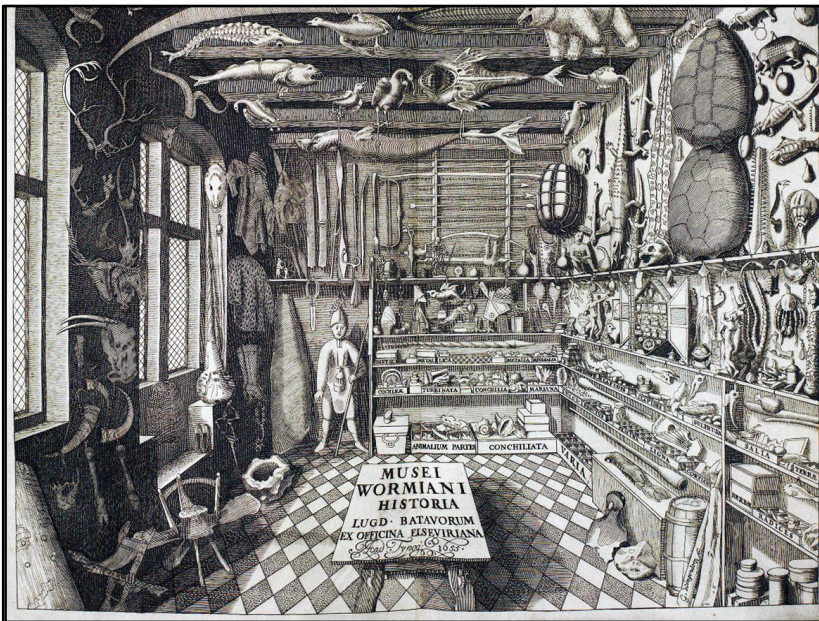


Figure 2.1 Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities. Permission to print image granted by The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

Establishing national honor occurred not only in Western Europe but also globally. The South African Museum in Cape Town, established by Lord Charles Somerset in 1825, provided a collection of natural and material cultural from local and distant peoples. In 1867, it moved to its current location in the Company Gardens near the

Parliament building (Iziko, 2014). An Act of Congress (9 Stat.102) established The Smithsonian Institute in 1846. It was at the bequest of James Smithson (1765-1829) who left his residual estate to the U.S. to create an establishment "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men" (Smithsonian Institute Archives, 2015) where experiments were performed, and explorations carried out to collect samples. On the other side of the globe, the New Zealand Exhibition of 1865 gave birth to the Colonial Museum in Wellington, the country's capital. The museums' activities, based on British models and organized by various projects of colonial exploration aimed to describe and classify the country's natural and mineral resources (McCarthy, 2007). The issue of society was no different from elsewhere as museumgoers reinforced the power of the dominant social groups (McCarthy, 2007).

### 2.1.2 LIVING ETHNOGRAPHY

In the mid 19th century, American Phineas T. Barnum purchased European cabinets and created exhibitions that were a combination of zoo, theater, lecture hall, and freak shows (Marento, n.d.). This was the "heyday" of museums when "living ethnography" of people was presented on display (Bennett, 2007, p. 48). An example of this, is the "Hottentot Venus" (actual name was Saartjie Baartman), a South African Khoikhoi woman who was displayed in an exhibition as a curiosity in the early 1800s in London and Paris.<sup>2</sup> Another construct of the time revolved around the national culture where certain British communities were seen as "primitive" (Coombes, 2004, p. 242).<sup>3</sup> Black colonized communities were considered different, and museum exhibitions perpetuated this elitist thinking. This idea of different exacerbated racial stereotypes in the early 1900s when British museums focused on evolutionary paradigms in the representation of material culture from its colonies (Coombes, 2004).

The exhibiting of "Other" as primitive did not completely end. The controversial hunter-gatherer camp (Bushman dioramas), located in the ethnographic gallery at Iziko South Africa Museum (ISAM), first opened around 1940 (Lane, 1996). The gallery provided a parallel to the British scenario when technically accomplished body casts of the Bushman (San) and Hottentots (Khoikhoi) were displayed. The diorama depicted the life of the Cape Bushman from the late Stone Age to approximately 1800 (Lane, 1996). Earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Museum director sought "specimens" that should be the most characteristic of "the Bush races" suggesting those with prominent sexual organs were best suited for the casting (Davidson, 1993, p.169): this is the same mentality shown by the British in "displaying" Baartman. A portion of the ethnographic dioramas can still be seen in the "African Cultures" exhibition at the museum, but the controversial exhibit was closed to the public in early 2001 for fear of offending the public and San descendants even though many San approved of the dioramas (Ouzman, 2006;

Witz, 2010). The exhibition had been one of the museum's longest running and most popular exhibits (Davidson, 2001).

In presenting of collections, such as those mentioned above, collectors and curators were somewhat ignorant on how to display objects belonging to other cultures; there was no thinking that *how* they exhibited and *what* they exhibited could be considered offensive. In *Reclaiming Culture*, Joy Hendry (2005), points to this ignorance with a poignant example of a Native American visitor viewing an exhibition at Oxford that contained human remains. The visitor commented to a group of Western visitors her disbelief of seeing the remains of her ancestors on public view- she told them that "the remains were sacred" to her people (Hendry, 2005, p. 31). Objects, such as remains, are considered sacred and should never be placed on public display. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) developed a Code of Ethics in 2006 where Section 2.5 directly addresses such matters. Conal McCarthy (2007) in *Exhibiting Māori* provides a similar example. In New Zealand, *Pākehā* (New Zealanders of European descent) viewed Māori objects as "curio" or "specimen," thus exhibiting took place within the popular context of the day "within a history of European spectatorship" (p.19).

### 2.1.3 THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'<sup>4</sup>

The Age of Modernity (the 1900s - late 1980s) incorporated the concept of leisure, education, and communication into museums agenda (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Hooper-Greenhill (2007), comments on British museum's transitioning from the term "museum education" to museum learning" in the late 1980s and early 1990s in hopes of softening the image of museums as being too serious (pp. 4-5). The shift suggests a "more open-ended" environment for a museum (p.5). It also proposes a change in how a curator plans and creates exhibitions. The curator's role also changed as cultural groups, whose histories and identities had been ignored, began to demand representation in exhibits, and pushed museums to embrace the struggle for justice worldwide (Sandell, 1998; Sandell and Nightingale, 2012). A secondary reason for such demands arose from museum entry fees being prohibitive for marginalized groups, whom asked, "Who gets to be admitted?" (Marato, n.d.). In keeping entry fees high, museums continued to be perceived as a 'cabinet of curiosities' for society's elite. Unfortunately, the question of museum fees and who can get in is one that still one of concern (Sandell, 1998, p. 402); consequently, it also relates to a museum identity and to what extent it is inclusive. If museums continue to be exclusive to certain audiences, questions of narratives and voice are perpetuated, as is its relationship with the source communities it serves.

Peter Vergo (1989) used the term "The New Museology" to define a new concept for museums. He posited:

*State of widespread dissatisfaction with the "old" museology...what is wrong with the old museology is that it is too much about museum methods and too little about the purposes of museums. . . .Unless radical re-examination of the role of museum within society—by which I mean measuring their 'success' merely in terms of criteria such as money and more visitors—takes place, museums may well find themselves dubbed 'living fossils' (pp. 3-4).*

Based on the amount of literature on creating change in museums, it appears museum practitioners and scholars acknowledged Vergo's suggestion. The concept of new museology began to shift museum's priorities in consideration of its social and political sensitivities; however, it is hard to find research that suggests how such change is measured and what still need to be accomplished. A review by Sharon Macdonald (1990) on Vergo's book *The New Museology* suggested that one of the problems is the vagueness within the defining the role of museums as educational institutes. She questioned whether education was what museums' were concerned with as it depends on what knowledge visitors take away with them. Thus, she suggests *more focus* should be on *how the curator chooses objects and how those objects are presented* (Macdonald, 1990). Engagement and education in museums are not something solely concerned with visitors; it also concerns the way a museum forms relationships with its stakeholders and the communities it serves (Welsh, 2005). The latter needs to include marginalized communities, which are not always part of the museum's public/paying audience.

Deirdre Stam (1993) also shares concern about the objects chosen in her article, 'The Informed Muse: Implications of "*The New Museology*." She suggests future directions for museums would be to "encourage flexibility in the interpretation of museum objects"; "increase the understanding of implicit economic and political biases"; "advocate increased communication of information among interested parties including staff, object-makers and museum visitors," and "increased coordination . . .in collecting, displaying and interpreting museum objects" (Stam, 1993, p. 281). But *how* does this take place, what policies have been formulated to carry out these suggestions and what forms of assessment have been implemented? Stam provides valid points to consider, but she fails to mention the need for and importance for a museum to create working partnerships with the Indigenous peoples or other marginalized communities, the museum represents. What avenues of communication can museums develop to provide a balanced relationship with and the representation of the communities represented in it?

#### 2.1.4 DEFINING "MUSEUM"

How a museum is defined and who defines it creates significant considerations to answer all the research questions. Definitions of museum come from various levels,



international conventions and organizations, the museums mission and vision statements, interpretation of these by the curators, and how the communities the museum serves defines it. Organizations such as The International Council of Museums (ICOM) provide museological definitions, policies on safeguarding of objects, and guidelines for the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage. Often terminology at this level filters down to the museums' mission statements and can signify how the museum sets policy and how seriously it considers inclusivity.

ICOM and the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) operate under the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) formed in 1945 to be the intellectual agency of the United Nations. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) was organized in 1946 by and for museum professionals. Currently, it has a network of 32,000 members representing the global museum community with consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ICOM, 2015). Through ICOM, a code of ethics was adopted in 1986 and revised in 2004 setting the minimum standards for practice and performance of museum professionals.<sup>5</sup> At their 21st general conference in 2007 the following definition of museum was adopted (ICOM, 2010-2015):

*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.*

ICOMs definition refers to “service of society and its development” and “communicates and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage of humanity.” However, it *does not* point to ‘which’ societies or ‘how’ it will communicate the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity. While ICOM mandates influence museum ethics, it is the political framework of each museum that determines the attitudes and levels of service in it (Lang, Reeve, and Woollard, 2006). Additionally, there can be a profound effect when party politics become too conservative or liberal for museums in nations where the government intervenes (Lang, et al., 2006).

An awareness of ICOMs Eurocentric influence on museums mission statements in various researchers works including Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000a, 2000b, 2007), who devised the concept of the *post-museum*. To accomplish this, several dimensions were needed: (1) the museum takes on a higher-level of understanding the complex relationships between culture, communication, learning and identity in an attempt to approach new museum audiences; (2) the promotion of a just society, and (3) that social responsibility is tied into how they represent and reproduce culture, and create self-identities (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, pp.1-2). A post-museum

seeks to share power with the communities it represents though listening and encouraging active participation and by not shying away from the difficult issues (Marstine, 2006).

Janet Marstine (2011) has placed similar tenets in her "new museum ethics." Ethic codes that define a museum practitioner's responsibilities tend to be culturally defined and placed in a Western context—a context based on the ideals of Enlightenment (p. 6). She continues by suggesting museum ethics today should rest on the pivotal idea of moral agency. Moral agency includes incorporating the practice of social inclusion, radical transparency and shared guardianship (Marstine, 2011, p.11). Consequently, how a museum's mission and policies incorporate and promote a just society has relevance to the curator meaning making process. In the late 1990s, researchers asked curators to rank their museum's mission. Their responses placed education and preservation of collections on top, while educational enrichment and *playing a social role* were relatively low on the list (Ginsburgh and Mairesse, 1997).

Robert R. Janes (2010) reminds his reader that preserving, collecting, and interpreting are only processes and that a "mindful museum" is about synthesis (pp. 329-330). It involves realizing "that disparate voices are the stuff of insight and possibilities . . . especially important now, when society suffers from dissonant voices speaking in isolation" (Janes, 2010, p. 330). In placing "focus on the interconnectedness of our world and its challenges," mission statements in mindful museums can "empower and honor all people" (Janes, 2008, p. 23). The term interconnectedness is especially apropos for museum communities that consist of Indigenous peoples, but it can be problematic for museums who are unsure of what their national identity should be.

Roger G. Kennedy (2004) provides insight into a *national* perspective. For national museums, defining "nation" and "national" can be problematic, just as much as defining the term museum (Kennedy, 2004, p.306). A former Director of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, Kennedy states, every national museum is vastly different. He continues, suggesting the best any country can do is present the "best elements of their rich diversity" while being able "retain apartness while respectfully learning from one another," while emphasizing the importance to have an "inclusive definition of nationhood" (2004, p. 306). Thus, he states the need for the museum to clarify *which* of the nation's peoples *are included*. Similarly, Hooper-Greenhill (2000b) sees museums as a place where "master narratives are created," and where "museums are major apparatuses in the creation of national identities"(p. 25). Both researcher's comments embrace the ideas of new museology; however, where Kennedy addresses "national" and speaks of the museum having an inclusive definition, Hooper-Greenhill places inclusion squarely within a museum's narratives.

Other definitions of 'museum' provide a broader scope; "museums were once defined by their objects: curators were keepers, and their greatest asset was their collections . . . today they are defined more than ever by their relationship to visitors" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblatt, 1998, p.138), and "a museum can be a place, an instrument to achieve a specific aim. . . .(It) all depends on the ethical responsibility of the institutes and the curators" (Schärer, 2003, pp. 14-15). More recently, definitions of museums refer to the societal role they have, "museums, in their role as custodial institutions of the world's material heritage, must acknowledge and serve two unique communities—our ancestors and those who are not yet born" (Janes and Sandell, 2007, p.1). The last definition is the only one that refers to community—but not just any community, using the term *ancestors* implies going beyond the immediate community and speaks of the generational connection Indigenous peoples have with the past in relation to the present. These communities are referred to as the "silent ones that must be served" (Janes and Sandell, 2007, p. 2). *Silent* ones include other marginalized communities (i.e., children, physically disabled, immigrants, migrants, and other minorities), and could embrace ways of knowing not readily accepted by Westerners (intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional knowledge) that have been silenced. How do curators incorporate these *silent* dimensions?

Eugene Dillenberg (2011) proposes "museum" applies to a broad range of types representing various sizes and disciplines (historic houses, galleries, etc.) some with collections while others have none; while some hire professional staff, others use knowledgeable volunteers. The various definitions of museum may point to the notion of change. Welsh (2005) notes, "institutions continually experience change and constantly in a condition of becoming something else" (p.106). Change can be noted in terminology, policy, and employee demographics stated in a museum's Annual Report.

Continual change fits with the new museology. Peter H. Welsh (2005) states, "Museums never 'are.' They are always becoming" (p.106). He claims museums have been repositories, which has to do with relationships of museums with property rights and the manner of claiming ownership over material objects or cultural property in their collection. Repatriation and the issues surrounding it are paramount and related to Indigenous rights and a museum's handling of cultural artifacts, but the topic is outside the scope of this thesis.<sup>6</sup> Welsh's (2005) concern is that as long as museums position themselves as repositories, they are not moving forward to what they could become. In this light, they remain "stodgy institutional dinosaurs" (p.106) that have not moved into the path where museums are stewards and their representation is collaborative.

This sentiment is in line with new museology's suggestion for a transformation from museums being exclusive and socially divisive to museums that are socially responsible. A qualitative study by Max Ross (2004), with various museum

practitioners (curators, directors, educators) across several museums, concluded that public museums remain "contested spaces where diverse social groups still seek to assert a right of access and representation" (p. 100). Change is not easy; Richard Sandell (2003) commented that for museums to be socially inclusive requires them to have a serious shift in thinking about their relationship to society and the need to consider the idea of *expert*.

The commonality in the range of definitions is: open to the public, public service (education, enjoyment), collections (preservation and research), and exhibits (communication and interpretation). Dillenberg (2011) adequately notes that such descriptions are not specific to museums and that some museums can operate without having all the items proposing, "a clear definition of 'museum' remains vague and elusive" (p. 11). One aspect of the 'elusive' was encapsulated by Peter Stone's (2005) suggestion that Western museum structures and contents alienate native peoples by presenting stereotypes of their cultures, which often stems from political influence and gets trickled down through a museum's hierarchy. While this act is hopefully unconscious, it creates adverse relationships between the two parties; the native people and the curators who create museum exhibits (Stone, 2005). I suggest that the terminology museums use to define themselves in their mission statements have implications for constructs used by museum practitioners and how they relate to what is exhibited. Thus, for museums to provide a pluralist approach, they need to include and collaborate with the "silent ones" (Janes and Sandell 2007, p. 2) at all levels.

## 2.2 THE EVOLVING ROLE OF CURATOR

The term, *curator*, has evolved and will continue to do so. How the term is defined as opposed to how the curators who participated in this research defined it may differ. Knowledge of the evolution of the term provides a framework for understanding how various voices surrounding curators are integrated. Additionally, it provides a link between a curator's construction of meaning making within a given space, and the degree of collaboration they have with source communities in that process. In seeking an answer to the first research question on the role of a curator, is to understand if a curator's definition parallels the language used in the museum's policy (RQ2).

The term *curator* first appeared during the 19th century as a museal profession. A curator was in charge of "all the tasks directly related to the object in the collection, their preservation, research, and communication" (ICOFOM, 2009, p. 68). Training was established through specific studies in art history, natural sciences, ethnology, anthropology or archaeology, but it was not grounded in museological studies until recently. Curator is a term derived from Middle English denoting an ecclesiastical pastor, and from old French *curateur*, and later from the Latin word *curare*,

meaning to 'take care of.' The current meaning of the word, "a custodian or keeper of a museum or other collection" is from the 17th century (Curator, 2015).

John Nicks (2001) framed the role of the curator suggesting, "it includes formulating the exhibition concept . . . curatorial research (thematic and object) . . . collection evaluation, selection and development . . . documentation, conservation, and preparation of the exhibition brief" (in Lord and Lord, 2001, pp. 353-357). A list of roles does not provide information about the process. However, earlier in the same chapter Nicks (2001) refers to the use of "the authentic voice" (p. 346) used by a curatorial team in British Columbia, Canada that involved Native communities whose voices and interpretations become central to the team's planning.

John Reeve (2006) noted that the primary role of curators working within a design team is as an *interpreter*, and he suggests curators, as well as directors, are often too protective of their exhibition programs. He advocates for consultation and an early discussion process shared amongst the exhibition team. Marstine (2006) goes further stating a curator acts as more than a facilitator and takes on the responsibility for representation and the critical inquiry that surrounds it. A similar sentiment was expressed a decade earlier stated, "the role of the curator has been decentralized, as more voices are encouraged to take part" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 210). Whose 'voices' are part of the process, to the extent they are heard relates to not only the first research question but has a relational effect on the other three questions as well.

Christina Kreps' (2003) concept of appropriate museology extends the meaning of curator to bring in the role of caretaker. This broadens the scope of the term to include being a guardian of cultures, similar to the role held by priests and tribal elders. Kreps broadening of the term begins to answer a question asked earlier in the chapter about whom the expert was. Is it the curator *or* the communities of the artifacts and narratives being represented? In defining curator, Kreps (2003) states:

*Museums and museological work do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of larger sociocultural systems that influence how and why curatorial work is carried out. Because curating cannot be divorced from these contexts, it seems appropriate that scholars and museum practitioners are redefining curating in terms that acknowledge the social and cultural dimensions of both objects and curatorial work. This perspective allows us to transcend current debates over whether museums and curating should be either object or people focused. These orientations are not mutually exclusive. Objects in museums only have value and meaning in relation to people. What is needed is an approach to curatorial work that recognizes the interplay of objects, people, and societies, and expresses these relationships in social and cultural contexts (p. 312).*

Kreps considerations are seemingly overlooked in others definitions of a curator's role as she draws attention to the social and cultural dimensions and the multivoicedness within curating. Viewing curating as a social construct situates it in specific cultural contexts where the act of curating itself becomes a cultural artifact comprised of different kinds of relationships between people, objects, and wider sociocultural contexts (Kreps, 2003).

Additionally, scholar Phillip E. Cash Cash, (Nez Pierce and Cayuse) places the role of a curator as a form of social construct where social practice is predicated on the "principle of a fixed relation." This, he continues, refers to "conditions that are socially constructed and reproduced as strategic cultural orientations vis-à-vis material objects" (Cash Cash, 2001, p. 141). This also situates the position of a curator in a specific cultural context. It implies each society has a certain ways of seeing things, of placing value on them, and of respecting them. Native worlds are reproduced through museum exhibitions, but if the cultural artifact displayed remains coded in a Western context, its native identity remains silent—no new symbolic approach is achieved. Cash Cash (2001) posits that such practice of coding is "inherently ethnocentric" (p.143). This introduces the concept of Indigenous curation (Kreps, 2005) and the acknowledgement that different knowledge systems convey there is more than one form of meaning making.

Curation is perceived through a lens that assumes the concept of *museum* and its practices are manifested in Western cultural traditions (Lonetree, 2012; Cash Cash, 2001; Hendry, 2005; Kreps 2003, 2005). Indigenous curation is a term used to define a museological behavior for "non-western models of museums, curatorial methods, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation" (Kreps, 2005, p. 3). From Christina Kreps' viewpoint, it is comprised of activities, practices, and *knowledge systems* that demonstrate the preservation of valued cultural materials and traditions. Kreps (2005) points to curatorial work, in the context of Indigenous curation, as a social practice rooted in a more encompassing social structure that defines people and their relationship to objects. It also redefines the role of a curator's relationship with the Indigenous communities as being equal partners. In a lecture at the School for Advanced Research (SARS), in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Christina Kreps reminded her audience that when working with Native communities there is no special way of curating, no matter what regulations or laws suggest. Each tribe has its own way of doing (Kreps, 2010).

The variety of definitions raises consideration for what is the appropriate terminology. An article written by Vicki McCall and Clive Gray's (2014) addresses museum practice and organizational change. It suggests one of the factors that limit the implementation of the new museology is due to the negotiation of power relationships within the museum. It suggests it affects policy and role ambiguity, such as that of the curator, and how it influences the representation of diverse communities represented by the museum. Despite influencing voices from the

governing body, “individual curators can make a difference.” In writing these words, Hooper-Greenhill (2000b) suggests curators can create change based on “the position they take towards issues of democracy and empowerment” (p.19). Knowledge of politics is the difference change requires, as cultural politics “implies the possibility of agency or action, rather than mere abstract theorizing, as a purpose for analysis” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b, p. 19).

Many museums specifically hire curator’s of Indigenous heritage to work in the Indigenous galleries so a native voice is heard. How does his or her role change when working with an Indigenous community he or she is not part of? Is it different from a non-Indigenous curator working with a community from outside his or her own cultural background? These concerns are discussed in Chapter Seven’s Cross-Comparative Discussion and are central to all four of the research questions

### 2.2.1 EXHIBITION VERSUS EXHIBIT

Knowledge on what and how an exhibition and exhibit are classified is relevant and helps answer the third question, which concerns how curators present narratives within the museum's semiotic landscape. The composition and connection of narratives within each in the exhibition are of particular relevance. M.R. Schärer (2003) stated exhibitions appear as “explanatory *visualisations* of absent facts through objects, and methods used to display these” (in ICOFOM, 2009, p. 36). An *exhibition* refers to “the resulting action of displaying something as well as the whole of that which is displayed, and the place where it is displayed” (ICOM, 2009, p. 34-35).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1990) questions what to include when exhibiting an ethnographic object and provides an example using a cup and saucer. Does the curator also provide sugar, milk, spoon, a napkin, a table, and a chair? Where does the exhibition begin and end—how fragmented does the object become? If the object/artifact is detached and fragmented, its context or its ability to be *in situ* becomes in question.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1990) states this has a tendency to *show* an object as special is likened to presenting it as art; in other words, it provides a means of framing. Methods of ‘in context’ situate an object through labels, audio explanations, exhibit catalogs, and its relation to other objects around it—within its frame. Both the ethnographic and the ‘in context’ methods position the object to be ‘on show.’ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s (1990) concept of an exhibition as a place to ‘show,’ stresses the importance of the difference between *to show* and *to communicate* in a world where edutainment places more emphasis on first rather than the latter. The former often orients museums more as *exhibitionist* or *theme park* than exhibition (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992).

Kerstin Smeds (2012) in her article, *On the Meaning of Exhibitions* refers to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) definition of an exhibition as a display of many *diverse discourses* forming one integrated multimodal text. She states the 'text' communicates something as soon as the visitor appears and starts reading or engaging with it, in other words meaning creation and learning begins. I suggest meaning begins with who is involved in the planning and presenting of exhibits, which allows learning to begin internally before it is extended externally towards the audience. Placed in the context of *visitor* research Smed's point is relevant; however, visitor studies apply to just one aspect of learning and communication taking place within a museum.

Hopper-Greenhill's concern for exhibitions to communicate is formally structured in section four of the ICOM Code of Ethics (2013) that refers to how museum provide opportunities for the appreciation understanding and management of natural and cultural heritage. Three articles in ICOM code of ethics provide relevance to display and exhibition:

*Section 4.1: The exhibitions...should be in accordance with the state mission, policy and purpose of the museum;*

*Section 4.2: Museums should ensure that the information they present in displays and exhibitions is well-founded, accurate and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups or beliefs;*

*Section 4.3: Human remains and materials of sacred significance must be displayed in a manner consistent with professional standards and where known taking into account the interest and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from whom the objects originated. They must be presented with great tact and respect for the feelings of human dignity help by all peoples.*

The first item addresses museum policy, yet there is nothing to suggest the need for museums to take a political stance in their exhibitions by exploring social problems (Sandell, 2003). Placed together, Sandell's concern and ICOMs framework develop a to provide national narratives that reflect the voice of the Indigenous peoples living there.

National museums place meaning making in a unique light. National museums appropriate a national identity (Coombes, 1988; Macdonald, 2003; Sandell, 2003); therefore, by empowering the voice of Indigenous peoples builds on their identity within the community and society as a whole. While not speaking specifically about national museums, Bernadette Lynch (1995), stated:

*Museums continue to have difficulty . . . with the understanding and implementation of 'empowerment' . . . Empowerment is a process that*



*enables individuals and groups to fully access personal/collective power, authority and influence and to employ that strength when engaging with other people, institutions or society. Empowerment is not giving people power—it is letting this power out. . . .Consequently, by not challenging power relationships, museums have not enabled others to imagine their world differently (p. 218-219).*

Empowering Indigenous communities as partners in all phases of curation provide a means to deconstruct Western forms of meaning attached to the objects. The action creates agency, dignity, and self-determination for the community and how their culture is represented (Simpson, 1994, 1996; Sandell, 2003; Kreps, 2003, 2005; Janes and Conaty, 2005; Lonetree, 2012, Janes, 2013, 2016). The principle or right of self-determination is “embedded in the abstract terms” used in important international legal documents such as the United Nations Charter (Anaya, 1996, p. 6). The term can be understood as emerging from human rights. It is “grounded in the idea that *all* are equally entitled to control their own destinies”, and it “gives rise to remedies that tear at the legacies of empire, discrimination, suppression of democratic participation and cultural suffocation” (Anaya, 1996, p. 98). Attention in this thesis is on the representation of Indigenous peoples; however, the context of self-empowerment above relates equally to all marginalized peoples.

### **2.2.1.1 Defining “Exhibit”**

According to ICOFOM, defines an *exhibit* as “the sum of elements (objects, visual, textual, and audio elements) within an exhibition” (2009, p. 36). ICOFOM continues to state, exhibits “work as signs in the exhibition is presented as a communication process, which is most often unilateral, incomplete and interpretable”(p.36). In the same light, ICOFOM (2009) defines *communication* as “sharing with different publics, of the objects in the collection and the information resulting from research on them” (p. 29). The definition continues by stating, it is “*unilateral*, without the possibility of reply from the receiver.” If it is “unilateral,” can it be called communication?

Eugene Dillenbourg (2011) provides the following criteria for an exhibit:

- (1) *physical environment* first and foremost. As a means for communication, objects take up space producing messages,
- (2) *an experience*: exhibits create an active experience provided by movement through it, and the information received quantifies the museum’s obligation to educate,
- (3) *embedded as information* goes beyond being presented. The choice of the space, placement of objects, color choices, lighting, and other

physical aspects of the space have an effect on the meaning conveyed, and

(4) *the design* gives the space and objects within it purpose in a museum's role as educator.

In conclusion, Dillenburg (2011) defines an exhibit as, "a physical environment designed for the experience of embedded knowledge" (p. 13). His focus relates broadly to the concepts within the new museology and how information is embedded. I suggest, it is the action of embedding meaning where meaningful two-way communication takes place if the museum curators listen to the voice of the source community. Additionally, this addresses Dillenburg's definition as it speaks to whom and for whom but does not include *how* exhibits communicate the museum's role in being socially responsible (Sandell, 1998, 2002, 2005; Marstine, 2006, 2011; Janes and Conaty, 2005, Lonetree, 2012, Janes, 2013; Kreps 2005, 2015). Once again, if museum communication is "unilateral" it seems to be concerned only on how a visitor *interprets* an exhibition, and not on the communication *process* of exhibiting.

Exhibitions and exhibits communicate meaning potential. In museums, the act of communication lies with the communicator; in this case, it is the curator, who is a "power broker" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a, p.134). She considers communication in museums as a technical process, where textual information is limited to varying degrees of information or references that are presented in specialist language and with no means of understanding what response viewers take away is. Hooper-Greenhill (2000b) suggests the *receiver* of the message is only considered in relation to what message is given; they are *passive actors*: passive because they do not hold any power—they are not part of the what went into the intended message. Her comment on communication as technological process presented in specialist language is problematic when considering Indigenous curation. The second half of RQ3 questions whom the *intended* audience, and attaches itself to RQ4 in whether the message provokes change or continues status quo narratives. Both relate to the involvement of the source communities in presenting a voice in narratives provided.

## **2.2.2. OBJECTS VERSUS ARTIFACTS: MORE THAN ONE FORM OF MEANING**

For Indigenous peoples, both tangible and intangible objects have an innate value and meaning unfamiliar to Western ideology. Indigenous Australian researchers, Karin Martin and Booran Mirraboopa (2009) state:

*To represent our worlds is ultimately something we can only do for ourselves using our own processes to articulate our experiences, realities, and understandings. Anything else is an imposed view that*

*excludes the existence of our ontology and the interrelationship between our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing (p. 211).*

Meaning making is mediated within a communicative process between various partners as well as between the partners and the objects chosen: it is a negotiation and reconciliation of differences. Often the idea of museum curators of holding all the expertise creates barriers for communicating with laymen (Macdonald, 1998). The extent of the communication and collaboration between curators and Indigenous peoples is one of the aims of this research, as the communication between the two parties creates a transformative aspect to meaning making; therefore, it affects the overall meaning potential of the exhibition. How each practice views an object relates to their sociocultural context of it; thus, communication conveyed varies depending on the knowledge a curator has with the object.

In museum work, there are two manners of understanding objects: material culture and visual culture (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a). She states: "Material culture primarily focuses on three-dimensional objects; to materials and their significance; their relationships to each other and the history, geography, and social context of the object" while visual culture in an intellectual field concerns itself with display, and the "relationships between the viewer and the object viewed" (p.107). Material culture used indirectly provides useful methods for curators to analyze their collections (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a). The lack of museum exhibitions to frame material culture within its social and historical context frustrates some archaeologists (Ouzman, 2000).

For many Indigenous peoples, objects are not just objects (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2009; Smith, 2012; Lonetree, 2012, Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013, Kreps, 2015). They are sacred materials, symbols of status in the tribe, family heirlooms. Thus, the meaning placed on these objects differs from how most Western cultures would draw meaning from them, as they become both tangible and intangible. If we put our self in front of a work of Indigenous Australian art would it be immediate for a non-Aboriginal to understand its symbolic representation? Would a non-Aboriginal know that the symbols (arcs, concentric circles, bars, dots, wavy lines) reflect the land and events of the creation era? It would be a difficult task as even different Indigenous people may guess incorrectly as they would not have the same knowledge of the related mythology (Isaacs, 1984).

An important distinction in knowledge systems centers on how a curator uses the term 'object' or 'artefact.' Karen Cody Cooper (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), a former member staff member of the NMAI, stated the term 'object' is "patently offensive to many Native Americans because it refutes the idea of animism, or life within the materials" (in Kreps, 2015, p. 10). An artifact is something made or

modified by humans, and the term implies relationships in a different way than an object. Based on comments by Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama (2013), Kreps points out that 'artifact' remains an imperfect word from a Native American perspective, but it is the most suitable word in English. Semantics in this instance relates to artifacts are not "passive, inanimate objects" to serve as evidence, but they are "enmeshed in social networks and are as living members of the community" (in Kreps, 2015, p.11).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) state, the meaning of an object is not fixed; it is constantly changing. Meaning varies according to who is looking at the broad range of sociocultural factors they bring to it: the person's history, personal background, knowledge of the object, all become part of the meaning making process (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). An object in a museum only has meaning in relation to people; therefore, curators need to "recognize the interplay between objects, people, and societies and expresses the relationships in social and cultural contexts" (Kreps, 2003, p.312). Thus, the object a curator chooses to exhibit has meaning that is mediated from his/ her perspective; however, the meaning attached is not necessarily shared by the source communities from where the object was derived, as pointed to by Martin and Mirraboopa (2009). Hooper-Greenhill (1999) agrees that meaning making is not an entirely individual process. In this thesis, it involves meaningful interpretations made by museum curators *with* members of the source community represented. Thus, the particular social and cultural environment of the actor(s) shapes meanings.

Hooper-Greenhill (1999) provided an example of how various exhibitions of the same thing can infer different meanings. An exhibit at the Australian Museum presented the move of the Māori meetinghouse, *Hinemihi*, from New Zealand to England. Different interpretations were made by Māori in New Zealand, the British colonizers who bought and moved it, an ex-pat Māori living in England, and a contemporary British citizen who had no knowledge of its past. For the Māori *iwi*s (Ngati Hinemihi and Tuhurangi) of the North Island who built the meetinghouse in 1880, *Hinemihi* signified a place where births and marriages were celebrated and deaths were mourned, and it also provided a place for cultural performances for the visiting tourists (National Trust). The name, *Hinemihi*, refers to a female ancestress that who was a descendant of the priest that brought the original members of the tribe to New Zealand. For the British colonists, it was a sign of the Māori's past, one that assumed was dying out. *Hinemihi* was saved, added to the Governor's collection, and taken back to England. For Māori living in England, it became a site where they can maintain their Māori identity (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). To modern day British that know nothing about it, it is merely an artistically carved house set in the lovely gardens of Clarendon Park across from a Palladian style mansion (National Trust).

Museums often forget about the importance of context and authenticity; however, in the field of archaeology authenticity and context are key tenets of the profession (Ouzman, 2006). As an archaeologist and former curator, Ouzman who specializes in rock art offers an example of context and authenticity in his discussion of the Lascaux II museum in the Dordogne area of France as presenting an 'authentic' reproduction of Upper Palaeolithic rock art, which is located close to the original cave. The original site closed to the public due to the sensitivity of the rock art images in relation to the presence of humans with the caves delicate environment. The replica of the caves has been so popular that admission is limited to 2500 people per day. In this instance, fake images create an aura of the authentic. Ouzman (2006) suggests "authenticity is a malleable concept and can accommodate fakes if they are old, spectacular, or endorsed by sufficiently authoritative connoisseurs" (p. 274).

Nevertheless, how one reads the images and experiences the replica coincides with a viewer's previous knowledge of the site, its history in relation to other reproduced caves with Upper Palaeolithic rock art, and a person's general knowledge of rock art. Audio recordings and exhibit text provide other forms of relationship with the object (rock art) relationship that helps decode and contextualize any meaning being formulated. Objects, such as rock art, may have living entities or life potentials for Indigenous peoples (McCarthy, 2007; Smith, 2012; Lonetree, 2012). Within Indigenous cultures, it is often the communities' responsibility to be the custodian for cultural objects as they hold more knowledge about it; however, not all rock art sites worldwide are fortunate enough to have such communities as guardians. Often the custodians are not willing to share traditional knowledge about the rock art (or other artifacts). The Hopi view is the "people don't have a right to knowledge," but it is an earned privilege taken away if abused (Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013, p. 235).

### **2.2.3 POST COLONIALISM: DEAD OR ALIVE?**

This section is relevant to answer questions regarding communication and involvement between curators, source communities, and political influence on the museum's policies, and a curator's role (RQ1, RQ2, RQ4). To some extent, the answer to this question depends on whether it is a Western or an Indigenous person's point of view.

Museum scholar and a member of the Cherokee Nation, Amy Lonetree's (2012) research found that Native Americans question how museums as Western institutions can decolonize when they are so closely linked with colonization. To decolonize, museums need to work with native communities in addressing misconceptions and historical inaccuracies of the past. Lonetree (2012), in her recent book *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native American in National and Tribal Museums* suggests that an important goal for museums is to assist Native

communities in addressing the "legacies of unresolved historical issues by speaking the hard truths of colonialism" (p. 5). Part of the difficulty for museums and Native communities is what Lonetree (2012) calls the "Native American Holocaust," which has taken so long to address that *truth-telling* becomes an important means for museums to move forward—no matter how difficult that may be (p. 5). In telling the hard truths, museums allow healing and empowerment for Native communities. Telling these truths would begin the process of breaking down misconceptions of a nation's past histories.

In *Everything you Know about Indians is Wrong*, Comanche author, cultural critic, and curator Paul Chaat Smith (2009) asked the question, "Are Indian people allowed to change?" He remarks, "there is a kind of racism that prevails in keeping romanticized constructs of Native Americans" (p. 91). Is it any different for other communities of marginalized peoples? The breaking down of misconceptions suggests a need to examine the language used to attach meaning to an object. Typically, the text does not "necessarily reference the community of the originator, its geography, or temporality" (Ouzman, 2006, p. 274). Thus, misconceptions may be less problematic if more exhibitions are in partnership with Indigenous communities. Decolonizing museums allow them to do more than shed their elitist clothing; it allows them to be socially responsible by bringing in and working communities and providing programs to increase their engagement (Lonetree, 2012). Both Smith and Lonetree's perspectives are discussed further in Chapter Five within the case study on the National Museum of the American Indian.

## 2.3 CULTURAL HERITAGE AS COMMON DENOMINATOR

For this research, intangible heritage becomes as relevant, if not more so than tangible heritage. For Indigenous peoples, much of the meaning of physical objects involves a more holistic process (Korn, 2007). How curators construct meaning in relationship to this knowledge (the intangible aspects) is dependent on the relational agency between the curator and its source communities (RQ2, RQ3). Even if the curator is of Indigenous background, he or she may still be an outsider to privileged information related to various cultural objects of other tribal affiliations. Similarly, Moira G. Simpson (1996) in her book *Making Representation* commented on how the subjects in exhibits—the original makers or users—have been traditionally passive informants excluded from the planning process.

### 2.3.1 TANGIBLE VERSUS INTANGIBLE

Common referrals to the term of intangible heritage can be traced back to early associations involving “invisibility, immateriality, incorporeality, and disconnection” (Kearny, 2009, p. 210). UNESCO defines ‘cultural heritage’ in its Draft Medium Term Plan 1990-1995 25th session C/4 (UNESCO, 1989), as:

***Programme III, 2: Preservation and Revival of the Cultural Heritage Background***

*The cultural heritage may be defined as the entire corpus of material signs—either artistic or symbolic—handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experiences. The preservation and the presentation are therefore, the corner-stone of any cultural policy . . . . Furthermore, the preservation of the cultural heritage now covers the non-physical cultural heritage, which includes the signs and symbols passed on by oral transmission, artistic and literary forms of expression, languages, ways of life, myths, beliefs and rituals, value systems and traditional knowledge and know-how . . . (p. 57).*

Tangible heritage takes on a recognizable form that is discernable and knowable. UNESCO defines tangible cultural heritage as, “buildings, historic places, monuments and artefacts considered worthy of preservation for the future” (UNESCO, 2015), while Kearny (2009) points out that performative cultural resources (intangible heritage) such as dance, song, language systems, oral traditions, and knowledge systems “reflect and draw connections between ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants” (p. 210). The Māori use the word *taonga* (treasure), something taken care of and passed down through the generations. *Taonga* conveys a sense of tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. This adds a dimension of complexity for a curator in presenting Indigenous cultures, especially if the source communities are not involved in the process.

In 2003 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) adopted the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (IHC), and it was entered into practice three years later. IHC was derived out of a need to provide a legal framework to protect the use, representations, expressions, knowledge, and knowledge techniques that source communities recognize as part of their integral cultural heritage. Article 2.1 of the IHC convention defines intangible heritage as:

*The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (ICHC, 2003).*

Although the ICHC refers to "mutual respect among communities," some researchers are in doubt. Henrietta Marrie's (2009) research tried to understand how the convention empowers Indigenous peoples to protect their cultural heritage, specifically the Aboriginals of Australia. Marrie's (2009) research concluded that the Convention falls, "way below" being able to be evaluated by "two bench-mark instruments," which are the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP), and the ILO Convention (no.169) Concerning Indigenous, and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries"(p.174). She reminds her readers, the world's population and cultural diversity have been developed by Indigenous peoples yet they remain one of the "most politically and culturally disempowered groups of peoples in the world" (p. 174). Marrie asks, why then are they so overlooked in this Convention?

Kreps (2005) places Indigenous curation as a form of intangible heritage as "cultural expression" is transmitted generationally; thus it is "constantly being recreated by the communities and groups, and provides them with a sense of identity and cultural continuity" (p. 5). With involvement, communities become stakeholders in identifying and developing means to protect their cultural heritage, Kreps (2005) refers to this as a "bottom-up participatory approach" (p.5).

## **2.4 AGENTS OF CHANGE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Change is difficult. Rex Ellis (1995) questioned how cultural diversity would play out in museums. New voices, he stated, "are beginning to look at our field and question what we (museum practitioners) do" and museum should listen to them (p. 15). The voices he spoke of are different then the voices heard from within the museum sector. According to Ellis, the voices were "not satisfied with politically correct or token efforts to temporarily fix the face" of museums, and they "demanded substantive, comprehensive, consistent, and qualitative change that includes them, their ideas and their cultures" (Ellis, 1995, p. 15). In concluding the article, Ellis advocates that museums can "no longer be a monument to a small



cultural elite that is in no way reflective of the people or times in which they live" (p. 16). Ellis may have been one of the first voices to recognize and promote the need for museums to be socially responsible.

A few years later, Richard Sandell (1998) wrote an article *Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion*, where he commented that there "was little supporting analysis or questioning the concept of social inclusion as it relates to museum sector" (p.401). To understand social *inclusion*, it is important to define social exclusion. A broad definition provided by Sandell (1998) states it, "includes those people who whether living in poverty or not are prevented from fully participating in the different systems of society" (p. 404). He places focus on relational issues, such as the "breakdown of links between an individual and their family, friends, community and state service and institutions" (1998, p. 404), of which museums are included in the latter. It infers that cultural systems are involved. This section provides relevance to each of the four research questions. Its title leaves open the idea of whom the change agent is: the government, the museum, the curator, or the members of the source community.

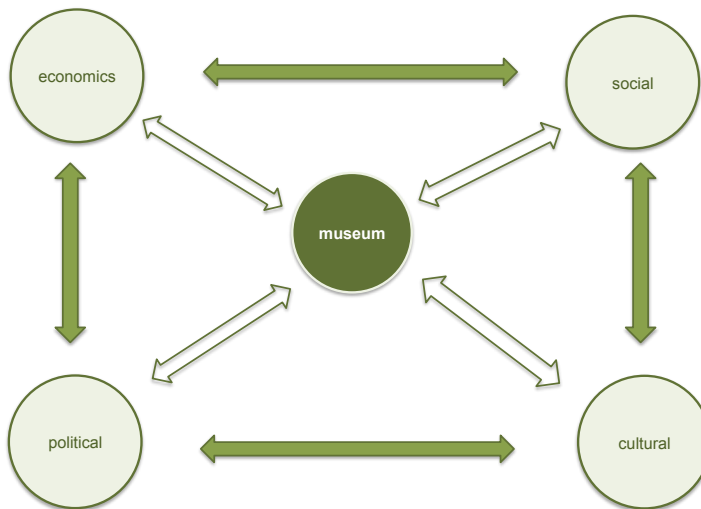


Figure 2.2 Dimensions of social exclusion, after Sandell, 1998, p. 410.

As previously mentioned, museums were and are still considered to be derived by the establishment. This suggests they continue to endorse the correct values and image of society, which can either affirm dominant values and / or reject alternative ones. Due to this, social, political, and economic dimensions of social exclusion are

evident within museums (Sandell, 1998). He claims the exclusion of minority groups is reflected in museums when they fail to provide narratives of the groups and deny them access to the services it provides, no matter how implicit it seems. Sandell (1998) indicated museums as institutions can be seen as reinforcing exclusionary practices through four dimensions (see Fig. 2.2.). The *first is economics* (i.e., ticket prices), and *the second is political* (i.e., government legislation, museum mission, liberal versus conservative government). The third is *social* (i.e., dominate values, status quo narratives), and the *fourth is cultural* (i.e., representation, participation, access). His consensus seems to suggest museums fail to provide narratives from the marginalized groups perspective, which compounds and reinforces prejudice and discriminatory practices.

According to Christina Kreps, former Director of Museum Studies at the University of Denver, Colorado, U.S.A., there is a glimmer of optimism. She suggests that museums are making strides to be more responsive to the needs of minority and Indigenous communities and more "sensitive to their rights to have a voice in how their cultures are represented and heritage curated" (Kreps, 2009, p. 193). Kreps research draws parallels between various legislation, and organizational mandates that were developed after the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted along with other guidelines and procedures for museums developed in the mid-2000s. Intangible aspects of Indigenous cultures were not paid attention to until this time (Kreps, 2009).

Reading NAGPRA and ICOM documents, and museum mission statements, it is easy to notice which terms are used and which ones are missing. In an interview, Robert R. Janes, former Director of The Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Canada, stated museums must "consistently revisit their missions and ask why they are doing what they are doing" (Søndergaard and Janes, 2012, p. 26) and consider whether the terminology used conveys inclusivity. Others request contemporary museums to include principles of diversity, shared authority, equality, and social justice—combined they define social responsibility (Marstine, 2011, p.11). The use of these terms in mission statements would convey an openness to engage in change and point to a museum's moral agency. However, it is not just about using the right terms, it is about taking action and implementing them. Additionally, such terminology needs to embrace the idea of distributed authority and power in decision-making at the upper echelon of museums and at the curatorial level (Kreps, 2015, p. 7). For national museums, revisiting and analyzing the terminology used in the mission statement may help remove political dimensions and ensure they advocate social responsibility.

However, the dimension of politics is not only found within policy statements, the architecture of the building, or the composition of objects on display; it also includes the knowledge shared between the various parties involved in the making of the exhibition (Macdonald, 1998). Macdonald proposed the various manners that

the ‘State’ is involved are not always discernible. Such things as display techniques, tone and readability (knowledge level) of labels suggest certain beliefs that may reflect or oppose historically situated cultural judgments (Macdonald, 1998). This comes back to the questions of *Who* is authoring the exhibition; *What* political interests influence the exhibit; and *Who* is the intended audience? While the questions are not overtly political, they challenge political (and power based) considerations that correlate to the level of social responsibility the museum attains.

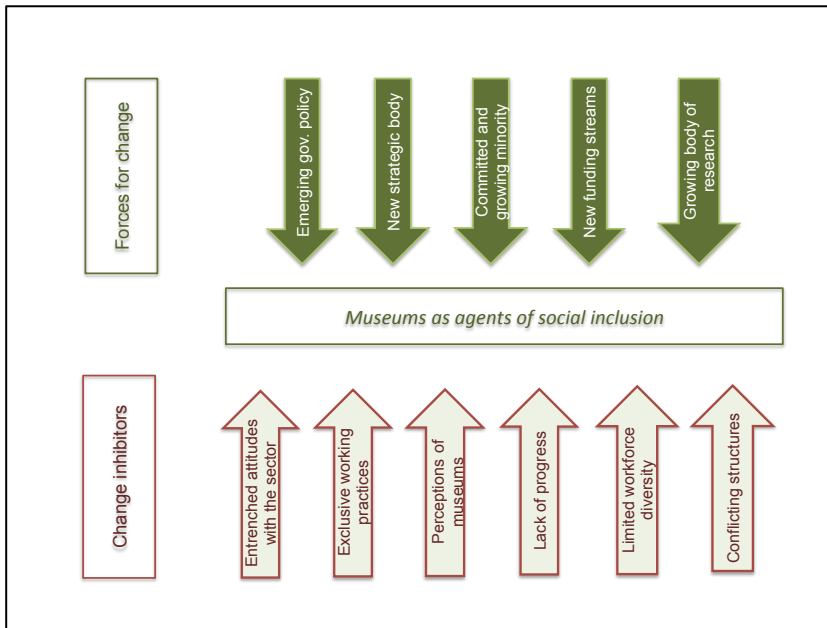


Figure 2.3 Assessment of current forces against change in museum sectors, diagram, adapted from Sandell 2003, p. 51. The addition of red signifies the difficulties in creating change.

Each dimension in Sandell’s diagram (Fig.2.2) is significant. In a sense, the dimension of culture is similar to a grassroots organization where change was established through increased partnership and the creation of programs to promote understanding among the wider national population. These considerations add to the process of change (Sandell, 1998). In a more recent article for *Museums and Society*, Sandell (2003) noted that for a museum to become an effective change agent for social inclusion a dramatic shift needs to take place in how they view their purpose and role within society. In the article (2003), he developed a diagram assessing current forces against change (Fig. 2.3), which shows the resistance of new concepts against the barriers of the old. He proposes that a shift in the museums’ mind-set is needed to develop substantially different roles and responsibilities. One aspect towards this concerns the renegotiation of their

relationship with communities where “be empowered to take part in the decision making process” (Sandell, 2003, p. 55).

Additionally, Janes and Conaty (2005) consider museums as social capital in the book they edited, *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility* specific examples of museums working to address the social concerns surrounding museums are presented from cultural and economic viewpoints. The book states museums can continue on the same track and maintain status quo in their mission of collecting, preserving and caring for the collections, or they can connect with their surrounding communities (and world communities). The first suggestion leads them to become irrelevant, and the second, allows them to address the many issues facing the world but is dependent on their mission (Tisdale, 2007).

Janes and Conaty (2005) refer to the decrease in visitor base of museums and the lack of diversifying that base, suggesting that, “organizations in the non-profit sector that build and enrich trust, caring and genuine relationships—social capital—upon which the marketplace is based” (p. 5). Such capital develops through long-term relationships, for example, partnerships with Indigenous communities. Museums should be measured and compensated by their amount of social capital (Janes and Conaty, 2005). This would replace the current method of assessment via visitor attendance and income generated from large special focus exhibitions with corporate sponsors. It is not enough to be socially responsible in one area and be conveyed as having depth throughout the entire institution (Janes and Conaty, 2005, p. 7). They propose a measurement of social responsibility could be decided by a balance in the demographics of the visitors, staff and source communities, the quality of partnerships with the source communities (i.e., educational programs, exhibition planning, and internships/training), and environmental considerations (i.e., cafes, gift shops, construction materials used). The last measurement could also include environmental issues presented in the museum's exhibitions; it is a point I mention in conjunction with the article on the representation of rock art (see Article Three).

Such ideas provide an encompassing means of redefining how museums measure success. The aspects of social responsibility for this thesis focus on the relationship between a museum's mission as it influences the relationship between museum curators and the source communities.

## 2.5 LOCKING THE PIECES TOGETHER

The scope of the review provides the framework to answer the aim and the four research questions. It points to ongoing research on exploring different facets of museum's role to be socially responsible. The historical development of museums set the foundation to understand how museum agendas are set and how they relate

to a curator's representation of Indigenous peoples. Research shows undercurrents of an activist approach to the new museology, Indigenous curation, and new museum ethics could advance post-museum developments in the promotion of empowerment for Indigenous communities.

Despite the volumes of research on these topics, there seems to be a gap in research that places focus on the *curator's* meaning making process and *whose* voices influence it, and *how* it correlates to the representation of marginalized fractions of society. Within the scope of this research, my primary focus is on the representation of Indigenous peoples. Two parallel studies provide insight on the representation of children's culture in toy museums and on the representation of rock art in national museums. The commonality between the three studies is the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, marginalization, and analysis of meaning making from a curators standpoint.

Using the concepts of *semiotic* and *social landscape* provides a means to understand the multivoices within the museum that influence the curators meaning making process of representing the nation's Indigenous peoples. The following chapter provides a discussion of how the two theories are applied.

## ENDNOTES

1. Australian Aboriginal Proverb: <https://indigenousworks.ca/en/resources/articles-reports/fire-and-dream>
2. Hottentot is a pejorative word used by colonists to refer to the pastoralists Khoikhoi, while Venus relates to the Roman goddess. Alexander Dunlop and Henrik Cezar brought Baartman to England and enquired whether Bullock's Museum of Natural Curiosities would consider placing her on display, but William Bullock declined (Holmes, 2007). Soon after Dunlop and Cezar parted company, Cezar put the 'exotic' Saartjie in Egyptian Hall of the Piccadilly Circus wearing various adornments he brought from South Africa to accentuate her physical attributes. Bullock, a British Abolitionists, suggested that she had been taken from South Africa as property and not on her own free will, which she denied (Holmes, 2007).
3. A solid historical cultural background on the development and usage of 'primitive' and 'barbarian' is provided in the forward of Michael Cole's *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline* (1996). He traces the use of such terminology back to the ancient Greeks historian Herodotus whose use of the term barbarian referred to the histories and life of other people--non-Greeks, a different use than the prerogative sense used today. However, it was the Greeks who later used the term to refer to difference and of having deficiencies, in other words, uncivilized and uncultured. Columbus, according to Cole, admired their generosity, moral character, and intelligence, but once back in Europe, the image of the native population took on a mystical and fantastical image in the minds of Middle Age Europeans and one that continued to perpetuate through history.
4. The title of a song by Bob Dylan from the album of the same name: recorded 1963 and released 1964.
5. ICOM Code of Ethics Section 2.5 Culturally Sensitive Material: Collections of human remains and ma-te-rial of sacred significance should be acquired only if it can be housed securely and cared for respectfully. This must be accomplished in a manner consistent with professional standards and the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethics or religious groups from which the objects originated, where these are known (ICOM 2013:3).

6. The concept of property rights is a Western one that despite the establishment of acts like Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Acts (NAGPRA), property rights are still difficult issues that curators work with. NAGPRA was designed to address historical inequities created by a legacy of past collecting practices, a disregard for Native religious beliefs and burial practices, and the difference between how white Americans and Native American treat gravesites (Lonetree, 2012).

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild.' Only to the white man was nature a "wilderness" and only to him was the land "infested" with "wild" animals and "savage" people. To us it was tame.*

*Chief Luther Standing Bear - Oglala Sioux<sup>1</sup>*

### 3.1 FRAMING OF TWO THEORIES

In *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) stated, "Museums, like other social institutions, serve many masters, and must play accordingly" (p. 1). In the context of this thesis, I interpret Hooper-Greenhill's use of *play* as a challenge to the governing bodies of national museums to present inclusive agendas while working with any stipulations set by government mandates. What influences surrounding this challenge affect a curator's meaning making process in representing source communities?

Museums have begun to see source communities as an "important audience" and to consider how exhibitions are "perceived by and affect source community members" (Peers and Brown, 2003, p.1). When museums and source communities collaborate as partners, the community becomes the expert or authority on their culture, and places curation methods and exhibition narratives in the foreground. It is about creating an "equal relationship" (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 2). It involves museums acknowledging the need to let go of their role as *the* expert while establishing a framework to build relationships of trust with the source community members. Keeping in mind the dim view Indigenous peoples have about museums, developing trust is a critical part of creating an equal relationship (Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013; Lonetree, 2012; Smith, 2012).

Building trust does not come necessarily from museum's consulting with source communities. James Clifford (1997) suggests that if museums choose to merely *consult* they risk being perceived as authoritarian by the very people whose voice has been excluded. The status of national museums, most of which are government-owned, as a "civil society organization is both ambiguous and variable" depending on the amount of government control (Janes, 2007, p. 230). Thus, the various decisions (architecture, mission statements, exhibition concepts, educational programs, community relations, etc.) made by the museum board and director has

an impact on how we understand what curators chose to represent. Janet Marstine (2006) suggestion that, "museums are not neutral places that speak with one authoritative voice" (p. 2), is discussed in the case studies (Chapter Five).

An article written by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000b) stated, "The function of a museum as a communicator cannot be separated from issues of knowledge, power, identity and language"(p. 31). Her article points to museum communication as one-way and more of a "technical process" than a social and cultural one (p. 17). Lois H. Silverman (1999) wrote about a museum's communication process as a transmission between the curator and the visitor: this is a common topic for museum researchers to understand meaning making. However, I suggest the museum's communication is more than that and involves a social, cultural, *and* technical process that centers on a curator's construction of an exhibition where he or she is a "power broker" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.18). Thus, it has less to do with the visitor and more to do with influences that affect the curator.

Change in museum communication takes place with the introduction of new voices (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b), which implicates changes in a curator's meaning making process, the addition of more diverse exhibition narratives, and a change in the voice of power. The central role of communication is a process that includes the relationship between the intended meaning and the action taken in the process (Donnellon, Gray, and Bougon, 1996). Human communication is a social meaning making process that takes places within specific social and cultural contexts. In a museum, the power brokering comes from more than just the voice of a curator; it is communicated in the process of the architecture and design of the building, and the process of the governing body's development of the mission statement (Sandell, 2003; Janes, 2008; Marstine, 2011).

Based on this and the empirical research presented in Chapter Two, components of two theories related to landscape (semiotic and social) and communication were chosen to understand how objects and social language influence the curator's meaning making in an exhibition, specifically the representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples.

The first theory is the metaphorical concept of *semiotic landscape* from social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) that provides tools for analysis of compositional constructs (i.e., architecture and exhibition space, and exhibit design). The coherence of the *semiotic resources* chosen for an exhibition's composition communicates a particular concept or idea based on a curator's knowledge. Likewise, the same holds true for the architect's *design* of the interior and exterior of the building. The semiotic resources he or she chooses communicate a particular *reading path* of the museum's semiotic landscape. These resources are determined based on the social and cultural background of the architect; thus, they imply a specific cultural message (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). However,



although these authors recognized the socio-cultural context of constructing compositions they were concerned with understanding the outcome, not the *process* that went into it. This theory provides a foundation to answer RQ3 and RQ4, on the *how* and *what* narratives are presented.

The second theory is cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Cole, 1996). It focuses on the museum's *social landscape* through the conceptual concept of "as if" *figured worlds* (Holland, et al., 1998), *relational agency* (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005), and *multivoicedness* and *mediation* (Wertsch, 1998). These concepts provide a social, cultural, and historical means to understand the process of *what* and *who* influences a curator, along with the *how* and *why* he or she chooses particular objects to represent a specific narrative. Communication, in CHAT, is through an individual's *mediated action* within a specific social and cultural context. It examines the process, the how and why of negotiations to achieve a shared goal: the goal being a curator's representation of a source community. CHAT provides the framework to answer aspects of the four research questions.

Combining the two theories weaves central parts of CHAT and social semiotic perspectives together (Korn, 2007). Together they allow for a more robust and holistic understanding of the meaning making process of a curator(s) construction of an exhibition. Whose voices influence a curator? If only one theory were used in the context of this thesis, it would have provided an incomplete analysis. Thus, if the visual design of an exhibition's composition were the only focus, it would not be necessary to examine the social and cultural influence of the governing board's policies, or how a curator defines his or her role and the presentation of the voice of the source community. However, these aspects have implications on what is represented in exhibitions and the narratives presented. Museum studies that only attempt to measure what visitors learn from museums miss an important give and take communication process that takes place between the various museum practices. It considers how a museum makes meaning from a more holistic position. Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 provide an overview of the two theories.

### 3.1.1 SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPES

In the context of this thesis, a "semiotic landscape" refers to the composition of the overall architecture and exhibition space. The landscape of a museum provides the canvas for how a curator develops exhibitions; thus, an architect's design of the building plays a role in how an exhibition is framed. Social semiotics offers a form of inquiry, a way of asking questions that force an iterative process (van Leeuwen, 2005). Questioning creates an opportunity to understand how a curator's complex process of developing an exhibition exists in the physical elements of the museum's composition. "Social semiotics is not a pure theory; it only comes into its own when applied to specific instances and problems" (Kress and VanLeeuwen, 1996,

p.1). It provides a form of analysis of the visual language communicated by the museum through its governing body, architects, and curators. Social semiotics was developed as a grammar of visual design where:

*... visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction ... that describes a social resource of a particular group, its explicit and implicit knowledge about this resource and its uses in the practices of the group- it is a visual grammar of 'Western cultures' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 2-3).*

Visual grammar is a form of communication. Social semiotics takes the approach that "language from 'x' is produced by social actors 'y' or in social context 'y'" regarding the following:

*Communication requires that participants maximize the understanding in a particular context. They choose forms of expression they believe to be maximally transparent to other participants. On the other hand, communication takes place in social structures that are marked by power differences, which affects how each participant understands the notion of 'maximal understanding.' Participants of power can force other participants into a greater effort of interpretation; thus, their concept of 'maximal understanding' becomes different from participants who attempt to produce images that require minimal effort in interpretation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p.13).*

In the context of a museum's semiotic landscape, the above has implications for the influences on the architects and the curators (as participants of power), and the potential each would have to empower the involvement of individuals from source communities to be involved in the meaning making process. Societies are not homogenous, so the messages they produce reflect societal differences (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

Like a sentence, the grammar of visual design is made of different components that come together to communicate something specific. Thus, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest, meanings are presented via distinct semiotic modes that are "cultural and historically specific" (i.e., a museum's architect, a curator)(p.2). The action of choosing components of the visual design questions the motivation that formulates the relations between signs and the sign-maker.

**Sign-makers** (e.g., architect, curator) use forms they consider apt for the expression of their meaning; thus, signs are motivated and not fixed (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 8). The act of choosing semiotic resources for an exhibition questions the motivation that formulates the relations between what is signified (e.g., museum's building, exhibition) and the sign-maker (architect, curator). Kress and van

Leeuwen place their concepts of visual grammar within “Western culture,” which points to different cultures having different forms.

What is a **semiotic landscape** and how what is its role in visual communication? Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) define it as:

*The place of visual communication in a given society can be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society and, on the other hand, their uses and valuations . . . . Each feature of the landscape has its own history as does the landscape as a whole, and each is subject to constant remaking . . . . To a casual beholder, a landscape simply is, . . . . Yet, it is the product of social action and social history, of human work on the land, on nature . . . . (p.35).*

Visualize the term as an actual natural landscape where each aspect of the environment (trees, flowers, grasses, animals, rivers, mountains, etc.) provides a context for the development of the history of the overall environment. As one moves through the landscape, different parts become salient; thus, it is no different from being in a museum and walking from one exhibition to the next—our point of interest changes. Each different part of the landscape is a semiotic resource that provides meaning potential. The physical landscape and its semiotic resources are subject to constant change (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

Placed in a museum context, the meaning potential of an exhibit’s landscape is dependent on the semiotic resources chosen by the curator and the meaning potential placed on them by his or her culture. However, the meaning potential is dependent on how the audience reads the semiotic resources presented. Thus, it can be stated as:

**Semiotic landscape → semiotic resources → semiotic potential**

**Semiotic resources** are "the actions, materials and artifacts used to communicate and their meaning potential"(Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 285). Van Leeuwen (2005) bases this on how each resource has been applied in the past, and the set of affordances or semiotic potential actualized within the social context they are presented. Van Leeuwen (2008) stated:

*Studying the **semiotic potential** of a given semiotic resource is studying how that resource has been, is and can be used for purposes of communication, it is drawing up an inventory of the past, present and maybe also future resources and their uses. By nature, such inventories are never complete because they tend to be made for specific purposes (p. 5).*

In a sense, semiotic resources provide a visual discourse that can be "realized in different ways" and "are never only about what we do, but always about *why* we do it" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 98-104 italics added). Thus, semiotic resources provide semiotic or meaning potential. These two terms are used interchangeably, and meaning potential is used moving forward as it (to the author) provides a clearer message. Van Leeuwen (2005) describes discourses as:

*Discourses are socially situated forms of knowledge that concern aspects of reality (what takes place, where it takes place, who is involved) as well as related purposes and legitimizations. People will use a discourse about a particular context or communicative situation they are in (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 21).*

The term discourse refers to how "knowledge is developed in specific social contexts" and ways appropriate to the "social actors in a specific context" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 95). In understating the semiotic landscape of the museum, discourse places emphasis on the coherence of the landscape's composition.

### 3.1.1.1 Systems in a Composition

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), state, "visual structures produce images of reality that are bound up with the interests of social institutions within which images are produced and read" (p. 47). Cultural and social valuations and structures strongly affect the potentialities of meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The museum's semiotic landscape creates an overall **composition** that can be broken down into segments. In this thesis, the composition of the museum is presented from two angles; the architecture of the building and the design of its exhibitions representing the nation's Indigenous peoples. The composition of these landscapes refers to the arrangements of elements, the relationship between them, and how their narratives are linked via the systems (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Any composition contains three interrelated systems: information value, salience, and framing. The coherence of these systems provides the exhibition's narrative. The composition of the landscape allows for the analysis of research questions three and to some extent four (RQs 3 and 4).

In *Introduction to Social Semiotics* (2004), van Leeuwen contends, "composition provides coherence and meaningful structure to spatial arrangements" (p.179). The three interrelated systems provide a means to understand the coherence of a composition. The specifics of the function of each system are addressed in sections 3.2 (The Buildings Architecture) and 3.4 (The Curator as an Exhibitor). The

systems of the composition are used as a tool for analysis, and are described in methods (Chapter Four) and the cross-comparative discussion (Chapter Seven).

The first system is **information value**. It refers to binary relationships where one position in the relationship is seen as having more power (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The binary relationships considered in this thesis are Up /Down, Center/ Margin, and Foreground/ Background. Using Up/Down as an example, placing an object in the higher “Up” position places more value on the semiotic resource than if it were lower “Down” in a design composition.

The second system, **salience** creates a “hierarchy of importance among the elements” in the composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 201). How each semiotic resource, within a composition creates a difference between the various elements and how the viewer reads and interprets them. Modes, such as colors, light, and textures play a major role. Modes act as an adjective in a sentence. **Modes** are “socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resources for making meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 79). According to Kress (2010), different modes offer different meaning potential. He states, modes “produce distinct cultural arrangements and orientations” that provide a “specific lens on the world” (p.154-155) and affords the “relation of a form” where “meaning is motivated” (Kress, 2010, p. 155).

The third system is **framing**. Framing is a term frequently used in museum research. Janet Marstine (2006) suggested, “frames set boundaries and provide ideologically based narrative context that colors our understanding of what is included” (p. 4). Thus, it creates a sense of separateness between the elements in a composition while also providing a connection between them (van Leeuwen, 2005). All elements within a given space are described via their relationship with other elements in around them (Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). The framing of a composition creates a “balance,” a “visual rhythm,” and a “reading pathway” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 204). Visual rhythm refers to a repetition of shapes and colors (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996), and points to the interrelationship between the three systems.

Meaning making within national museums is framed via policy, political opinion, and exhibitions where “tensions can arise between the affordances and representation in different media and how it is framed by the institution” (Selander, 2008, p. 12), or the museum in this case. How a museum “frames” the building or the objects in its exhibitions, conveys its moral agency, to the degree social inclusion and forwarding social justice is transparent (Marstine, 2011).

### 3.1.1.2 In Summary

Representation is a "complex process" where the architect or curator, as sign-makers, seeks to represent a concept or an object from their "cultural, social, and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused within a specific context, in which the sign-maker produces the sign" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 7). Working under the directive of a museum's governing board, how an architect and a curator create a particular form of representation has implications on how the diverse cultures within a nation are represented and framed. Their action may aid in breaking down or establishing boundaries between museum elites and the communities where the objects/artifacts originated (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b; Macdonald, 2003), and assign unrelated meanings to an object's original function or intention (Marstine, 2006). Such cultural considerations add to the complex role curators have in *re-presenting* a museum's collection.

Boundaries create opportunities. If one considers, Kress and van Leeuwen's suggestion that semiotic modes are "culturally and historically specific," communication boundaries in exhibitions can be found when the inner voices of the museum are listened to. Thus, the semiotic landscape encounters the social language of the museum that influences the narratives. Therefore, the theoretical use of a semiotic landscape provides a partial means to understand what voices influence a curator; thus, another theory is needed to examine RQs two, three, and four. Thus, the semiotic landscape merges with the social landscape of mediation and the figured worlds of cultural historical activity theory.

### 3.1.2 SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) focuses on "both the individual mind and collective action," and offers a means to "analyze action in relation to the intentions of others" (Edwards, 2005a, p. 170). CHAT continues its development from "two related, but different" areas of research: sociocultural psychology and Vygotsky's work on mediation and activity (Edwards, 2010, p.170). Both branches follow L.S. Vygotsky's effort to provide an account of "learning and development as mediated processes" (Daniels, Cole, and Wertsch, 2007, p. 2) where an emphasis is placed on language.

A museum's governing body and its curators can be viewed as separate practices within one institution. Although the professional language used by each practice differs, they communicate the specific culture of the museum. Each practice uses a language that correlates to their specific role within the institution. Practice refers to the beliefs, ideas, and values of a specific group (Edwards, 2010). Their professional language is what Bakhtin (1986) called a **social language**. Social language, as a tool for analysis of the curator's interviews and the textual documentation is described in the methods (Chapter Four).

### 3.1.2.1 Cultural Artifacts and Mediation

A **cultural artifact** serves as a tool for mediation that shapes possibilities for thought and action and “is shaped by those who use them” (Daniels, et al., 2007, p.2). Artifacts are “products of human history” that are “ideal and material” at the same time (Cole, 1996, p.118), and become tools for mediation that reflect identity (Holland and Lachiotte, 2007, p.125). Tools for mediation encompass more than just physical artifacts; language plays an integral role in cultural mediation, for some it is the “tool of tools” (Cole, 1996, p. 108). In the case of museums, this can relate to tangible and intangible artifacts and the social language used by the governing body and curators working there.

Vygotsky divided social language into two forms of **mediation**, explicit and implicit. Explicit is when an individual directly and intentionally introduces a “stimulus means” into an ongoing activity; this is considered as being manipulative (Wertsch, 2007, 180). For example, in the context of a museum, this could pertain to policy and mission statements that contain the specific social language of the governing body. Implicit mediation is part of social and inner speech and is more fleeting. Implicit mediation is central to *thought*, whereas explicit mediation is formulated on *a word* (Wertsch, 2007, p. 182): Vygotsky suggested “word meaning” could be used as a unit of analysis. These two forms of mediation may seem to provide a binary relationship; however, Wertsch (2007) places them as sharing part of a broader conceptual framework that comes back to Vygotsky’s dictum that “sign meaning develops” (p. 186). Mediated action can be considered as a process of *interpersonal communication* through the interactions between subject, tool, and object. Vygotsky developed a mediational triangle where the interaction between the three can be viewed (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4 provide examples).

**Interpersonal** communication requires two or more people to interact, exchange, and act on information, whereas **intrapersonal** provides a means of mediating and reflecting on complex ideas (Edwards, 2007b). The intrapersonal need to be understood from a sociocultural context (Daniels, et al., 2007, Edwards, 2007b). This context provides an additional means to understand a curator’s meaning making process of the representation of Indigenous people from two different social-cultural angles. CHAT provides a foundation to answer the social context of the four research questions to understand what and how different voices influence a curator’s meaning making process. Mediation, in this thesis, involves how physical artifacts are used to present a certain exhibition narrative, but just as important is how meaning of them is mediated within the social context of the museum.

### 3.1.2.2 Figured Worlds and Identities

Since each practice has its social language and identity, it can be identified as a “figured” or “cultural world” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain, 1998). The

concept of a figured world allows each practice to be viewed as a separate world whose actors have the ability to make choices and changes. Holland et al. (1998), describe a **figured world** as:

*... a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over other (p. 52).*

*These collective “as-if” worlds are sociohistoric, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate behavior and so, from the perspective of heuristic development, inform participants’ outlooks. The ability to sense (see, hear, touch, taste, feel) the figured world becomes embodied over time and through continual participation”(p. 52-53).*

A figured world is “formed and reformed” based on the everyday activities that happen within it. An important aspect of “as-if” figured worlds is that they “happen, as a social process and in a historical time” (Holland, et. al., 1998, p. 55). These created worlds suggest what we do, why we do it, and how we relate or mediate with others. How we see ourselves in these “as-if” worlds relates to our position of power and identity (Holland, et al., 1998). In the context of a museum, a curator as an employee of a specific institution defines his or her “as-if” world in a specific way. The identity and power he or she attaches to the position (intrapersonal) can influence and create change or create boundaries with other figured worlds (interpersonal), this relates to RQ1. How then does each figured world, as a social construct, consider how it mediates and relates to others?

The definition of a figured world correlates with the idea that “Museums are fundamentally *social institutions* that influence and respond to *changing characteristics* and concerns for society” (Sandell, 2002, p. xviii, *italics added*). It suggests that those responsible for setting the museums' agenda are working within a particular social and cultural context of the ‘institution.’ Therein, each figured world has its own *cultural artifacts* that become tools for meditation.

**Identities** are formed in the participation of activities within a figured world. While the governing body and the museum curators are situated within the museum, the role of source community members could lie inside or outside the museum. The source community's role is dependent on how the museum views its relationship with them (Kreps, 2010, 2015; Lonetree, 2012, Cash Cash, 2001; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2014). Identity develops through relationships, actions (or the possibilities of), the impact of the actions, and feedback on the actions (Edwards, 2015). This suggests identities could be enhanced for the source communities, the museum curator's, and the social identity for the museum *if* there were a cohesive relationship and knowledge *sharing* between them (RQ4). The purpose of working



relationally is to accomplish a common goal successfully. Thus, it requires a common language that can act as a buffer and to mediate interactions and boundaries (Edwards, 2010).

### 3.1.2.3 Relational Agency and Relational Expertise

Anne Edwards has worked with CHAT and the concept of relational agency for many years in the area of teacher education and social inclusion. Her research posits that relational agency provides a capacity to work with others and expand the notion of the goal to be achieved (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005, Edwards, 2006, 2007a, 2010, 2011). She incorporated the use of figured worlds in her work to emphasize the differences in the mediation and relational aspects between practices with a common goal: the term *object* is used in CHAT. In the context of this thesis, the primary goal (object) is developing an exhibition that accurately represents a nation's Indigenous peoples.

**Relational agency** (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005) is described as "working alongside others toward negotiated outcomes," and it provides an alternative to the idea of professionals who are given significance through their ability to work independently (Edwards, 2010, p.61). According to Anne Edwards, (2010), it requires each practice (governing body, curator, source community) is "attuned to each other's purposes and ways of working" (p.61), and how the layers of expertise of each practice are shared.

The analysis of the social language used by each figured world accentuates the relational agency between them. In addition to viewing relational agency as joint action for a specific goal (object) Edwards emphasizes (2005b, p. 12):

- (1) The possibility of contesting interpretations of the object; the changing nature of the object;
- (2) The mobility, or changing nature, of the object (goal);
- (3) The fluidity of relationships, collaborations may be with different people and due to this relationships may shift with the action; and
- (4) The location of the joint action within or connected to systems that can deal with and expand the understanding of the 'object' or goal.

According to Edwards (2010, 2011), when professionals work across practices to negotiate a goal, two aspects of collaboration come into play. The first is each practice holds a specific expertise, and second, they combine both their core expertise and an additional form called **relational expertise**. This expertise stems from working across practice boundaries and is based on engaging with the knowledge of one's specialist practice as well as the ability to identify and respond what others offer from their local systems of expertise (Edwards, 2011, p. 33). For example, a museum curator works from a specific expertise of how the museum

operates, its expectations, and its collection, while a source community as a co-curator offers a different expertise based on the knowledge and traditions of their culture. Moving across boundaries would ask that each practice identifies and acknowledges the expertise of the other in negotiation. What talk takes place in the boundary space is important and goes back to implicit and explicit mediation and whether one voice asserts a particular meaning at the expense of others (Edwards, 2011).

Edwards use of figured worlds, relational agency, and relational expertise brings in Wertsch's (1991) concept of **multivoicedness**. Each world has a social language and its own way of representing reality. When representing another culture, a curator needs to make sense of any alternative views of the specific culture, so representation of its culture is supported more from *their voice* than the curators.' Therefore, "it involves drawing on the resources of others *and* being a resource for others" (Edwards, 2005b, p.9, italics added).

How an institution is shaped, correlates to how its meaning is conveyed and represented (Edwards, 2010). The language used by a museum can create boundaries. New meanings need to be formed through complex negotiation to break down boundaries where the "politics of representation" is difficult to ignore (Edwards, 2010, p. 54). The dominant group may agree to certain meanings that may lead to the exclusion of others from the boundary zone. It would be rare if the talk in a boundary zone were neutral, as strong emotions can be present. How boundaries are negotiated returns to Vygotsky's notion of mediation and Benhabib's (1992) concept of "communicative ethics" (in Edwards 2010, p. 56). The latter points to being aware of the views of others' expertise and being willing to work together towards a shared goal. Edwards (2010), comments, it is the differences that take place in dialogues between practitioners with different cultural histories that can lead to learning. In other words, boundaries create opportunities.

### 3.1.2.4 Summary

In trying to understand who or what influences a curator's meaning making process in representing a nation's Indigenous peoples, Edwards list above provides possible constraints for figured worlds to work together on a shared goal, such as a museum exhibition. Source communities are more likely to be *partners* if a museum frames its agenda towards presenting an inclusive national narrative. In this way, each figured world (the governing body, the museum curator(s), *and* the source community) has a relational aspect and relational expertise with the other. For example, the governing body depends on a curator's expertise to provide a specific narrative, and in turn, the curators depend on source community's expertise. How cultural artifacts are mediated between each *world* determines the exhibition's outcome. Additionally, the central goal (creating a representative exhibition) must be shared by all three worlds. The relational agency between each world provides

details of the purposeful action of meditational processes that occur in coordination with others and what influences it has on a curator's meaning making process.

Knowledge of the various forms of cultural artifacts and meanings attached to them point to Kreps' (2008) concept of appropriate museology. Instead of the typical museum hierarchy, she suggests a "bottom-up community approach" where a museum promotes and provides the interests of its community. A museum's tangible collection of artifacts stands opposite the oral intangible artifacts of traditional knowledge passed down through generations in Indigenous communities. A bottom-up approach suggests value is placed on the expertise of the Indigenous community and intangible artifacts. How each artifact is mediated within a museum correlates with how the voice of the source community is involved. Therefore, I suggest, the result of any mediation between the museum and the source community affects not only the museum's social landscape but also its semiotic landscape.

It is the combination of mediation, figured worlds, relational agency and multivoicedness of CHAT provides a window into a museum's social landscape of representation of Indigenous peoples. I see it as a learning tool for the researcher *and* those involved in the process (i.e., practitioners in the museum and source community members), as it concerns the collaboration process from the *how* angle as much as the *why*. How cultural artifacts, as tools of mediation, are used between each figured world gives insight into the negotiation and relational agency required to work together for a common goal. Additionally, it allows analysis of the "individual mind and collective activity" (Edwards, 2010, p. 64).

### 3.1.3 COMBINING THE TWO THEORIES

The theoretical combination of compositional aspects of semiotic landscape and the figured worlds relational agency within the social landscape is new to museum research. However, the use of semiotics (based on the work of Saussure and Pierce) in museum research has been used to analyze how "different contexts of meaning are invoked" by curators (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 2); and visitor reactions based on visual elements of the museum (Lindauer, 2006). Nonetheless, both researchers missed having a discussion of how the various individual elements of an exhibition are linked to the *entire* semiotic landscape of the museum. Additionally, Rhiannon Mason (2005) used semiotics as a way to "explain how societies organize themselves, and how communication is linked to the creation and operation of value systems that have real effects on the way people live . . . meaning is not fixed . . . it will change according to different contexts" (pp. 202-203). Here again, the research provides no consideration of the actual process in developing the *compositional* aspects of a context within the semiotic landscape. The context (a national museum, representation the Indigenous peoples of a nation) and socio-cultural elements

involved in the meaning making process of the exhibition's composition are central to this thesis.

Fundamental to this notion is the need for museum curators (Indigenous *or* non-Indigenous) to collaborate with and gain knowledge of the source community's expertise to frame the exhibition's context accurately (Kreps, 2005, 2010; Conaty and Carter, 2005). Each community has different ways of knowing (Grieves, 2009, Lonetree 2012); therefore, meaning is not something that is homogenous across cultures. The lack of collaboration creates implications for how the narrative of an exhibition is "read" in the semiotic landscape. What is presented in the exhibits (semiotic landscape) is the *outcome* of the curators and museum's intended *objective* (the goal of an accurate exhibition), which is mediated through the various actions of shared cultural artifacts (i.e., exhibition, expertise) between the museum, its curator(s), and the source community curator(s).

The literature review showed that in museum research political discussions center on mission statements and its implication of a museum's social responsibility. However, there seems to be no consideration for how the relational activity that shapes the mediation of cultural artifacts, such as mission statements, between the various practices in a museum. Such activity coincides with a museum's moral agency (Marstine, 2011). In a random check through the index of several books on museology, it was surprising to find the term "mediation" was not listed (Corsane, 2005; Marstine, 2006, 2011; Sandell and Janes, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Smith and Akagawa, 2009). The exception were the research articles of Doris Ash (2004, 2014; Ash and Wells, 2006; Ash, Lombana, and Alcala, 2012) where she incorporated CHAT using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The research of Ash and her colleagues focuses on understanding the meditational agency between museum educators and learners (visitors) by using Vygotsky's ZPD. In the edited book, *Understanding Interactions at Science Centers and Museums: Approaching Sociocultural Perspectives*, (Davidsson and Jakobsson, 2012), various researchers along with Ash, et al. use sociocultural perspectives and theories to understand the interactions between visitors and artifacts in exhibits, with museum staff, and with other visitors. For example, one aspect examines the mediated action that happens when a visitor at an aquarium feels an object in a touch tank: the researchers are interested in what actions follow (debriefing) and how they lead to new interactions (Davidsson and Jakobsson, 2012). It is interesting as editors, Davidsson and Jakobsson, mention the possibility of combining social semiotics and sociocultural theories in the introduction, but state the book does not encompass any research in that area.

Noted museum researchers on visitor learning, John Falk and Lynn Dierking (2000) developed a contextual model for learning devised of three overlapping contexts, one of which is the museum's physical setting. Although, their research

focuses on how aspects of the physical setting influence the informal learning of visitors it does not consider the overall composition of the semiotic landscape's of the museum's architectural design on *how* narratives are presented.

A suggestion to combine the work of Halliday and Vygotsky in the theory of language based learning research was conducted by Gordon Wells (1994). More recently, a research area that combined the use of the two theories is the field of media technology (Jewitt, 2005; Gilje, 2008). Øustein Gilje (2008) used the theories to investigate the cultural appropriation of digital production in an educational context through understanding the semiotic material, the agent (s), and their cultural tools. Jewitt (2005) investigated how a student's use of different aspects of multimodality within various forms of media in the classroom (websites, CD-ROMs, game making applications) acted as mediational tools for learning.<sup>2</sup>

Each theory by itself unveils only a portion of the investigation; but, combined they allow a more holistic investigation. In this thesis, landscape and communication link the two theories: one refers to the visual language of composition and the other to the social language of figured worlds and cultural artifacts. Social semiotics is more about analyzing a specific visual outcome, the coherence of a composition, where CHAT is about the actors involved in the process of accomplishing a specific task in a particular context. However, the cultural artifacts that act as tools for mediation between the figured worlds provide implications for the cohesion of the compositional systems (framing, salience, informational value) within the museum's semiotic landscape (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

### 3.1.4 LAYERS OF CONTEXT

Based on the research questions, four distinct areas of investigation were developed and are referred to as *layers*. The term is derived from Bateson's (1972) concept of "layers of context" (in Cole, 1996, p. 134). The phrase refers to the various levels of organization that is fundamental to language. In a language, each word consists of different phonemes that work in combination to create it. A word has meaning only in the context it is used (Cole, 1996). I extend the use of the term *word* to 'voice' as I envision *layers of context* to influence a curator's meaning making process. A voice is distinct to each context it is used. Each layer presents a different voice from a distinct context. The layers are the museum's architecture, the museum as an institution, the curator as an exhibitor, and the source community. Sections 3.2 to 3.5 provide a discussion of the theoretical application of each layer and the research question it refers.

**L1 *The Architecture of the Museum:*** The semiotic landscape is an apt term and tool to analyze the design and physical layout of a museum. As with any landscape, it can be understood only when the entire context of the surrounding environment is considered. Within national museum research, it can serve as a tool to understand

the links between government and museum policy that have specified specific design suggestions that affect the overall composition of the museum (including *national* identity). For a curator, the spatial design of the building has implications for how exhibitions are read (RQs 2, 3, 4);

**L2 *The Museum as an Institution:*** the concepts of social language, the “as-if” figured world, and cultural artifact from CHAT are used to understand the influence of the governing body on the social landscape of the museum. The governing body is placed in a figured world that is constructed socially and culturally. This layer examines the social language used in the policy and mission statements affect the representation of Indigenous peoples in exhibition narratives. The policy and agenda of the museum tacitly influences how a curator represents the nation’s Indigenous peoples (RQ 1,2,3,4);

**L3 *The Curator as Exhibitor:*** This level incorporates both theories. The semiotic landscape addresses coherence of the compositional systems (information value, salience, and framing) used to make meaning in exhibitions and whose voices are implemented in the design process (L1, L2). Analyses of exhibition images convey the coherence of the compositional systems used in an exhibition (semiotic landscape).

Curators work within a specific cultural and social context and hold a specific level of expertise. Such a context places them in an “as if” figured world with different cultural artifacts and social language than the L2 layer. The objective remains the same—the creation an exhibition that accurately represents the source community. The expertise of the curator is specific to their practice within the museum as an institution and how or what choices he or she makes. This layer addresses the relational aspects between the curator and governing body (L2) and implications it has for how a source community is represented (L4). Thus, helping answer all four research questions (RQs 1, 2, 3, 4);

**L4 *The Source Communities:*** CHAT is used to place the community as an additional figured world with its own social language and expertise. Central to this thesis is how is the wealth of knowledge and expertise held by the community shared with the curator(s) to provide their voice in the representation of their history and culture within the museum. The additional concepts of voice, relational agency, and cultural artifacts provide tools to understand what boundaries exist between the L2, L3 and L4 levels in achieving the objective of representing the community’s culture in an exhibition (RQ 4). In the following sections, key theoretical terminology appears in *italics*.

### 3.2 THE BUILDING'S ARCHITECTURE (L1)

The visual grammar represented in the structural elements of the building or exhibitions provides information value of how "nation" is identified. The visual mode and composition for each museum are unique. While it may not be explicit, the effect of the museum's semiotic landscape embraces the whole museum from its architecture (interior and exterior), to management decisions, and to how and what a curator chooses to represent in exhibits. An architect's design provides different information value based on structural positions and what modes are used to provide salience to various design elements. L1 examines how the composition of three aspects of the museum's architecture: its structural exterior, the exterior's natural landscape, and its interior layout of create semiotic resources that influence meaning potentials of the museum.

The location of the building can point to national identity. National museums often lie near or within view of the national seat of government, signifying its political affiliation; thus, location becomes a semiotic resource. In the case of national museums, the design of the building acts as a *semiotic resource* promoting national message identity within its architecture. How the site is composed becomes an initial source of meaning making for those who enter its door. The design of the museum's exterior frames the first salient image and hints at the formality of the exhibitions inside. Classical Doric columns would frame the museum one-way while a more theatrical "Bilbao Effect" (Janes, 2011, p. 59) suggests quite another. Landscapes have history, and for museums part of that history includes the architects whose design was chosen.

Additionally, the physical structure of a museum's *semiotic landscape* is set in the textures of the materials, the angles of windows and walls, the level of natural or artificial light emitted, tones, hues, and saturation of colors used, and the overall schematic layout (van Leeuwen, 2005). All of these aspects are semiotic resources that influence how a curator uses the space as a canvas and how others read it. In other words, each semiotic resource creates a semiotic or meaning potential. The concern at this layer is what the space signifies about nation, inclusivity, and how it influences a curator's design of an exhibition (odd angled walls, location of exhibition area, window placement, use of color).

Part of the history of a national museum's landscape is provided by its natural setting, which provides an additional opportunity to communicate an identity of the 'nation.' For example, if Indigenous peoples previously owned the land, or if the landscape and the museum building were designed in partnership with the source communities each becomes a semiotic resource that encompasses an aspect of the museum's identity. Therefore, the architectural structure of each museum

incorporates different semiotic resources that provide meaning potential for *framing* national identity.

The landscape surrounding the building plays the role of an adjective. *Saliency* in this example could come from running water, the movement of leaves in a grove of trees, or the way light (manmade or natural) plays off the materials used in the façade. All of these semiotic resources work together to provide information—to set the scene for what is to come. The use of modes (light, colors, sounds, and textures) accentuates the landscapes meaning potential; therefore, an architect's design can imply cultural and social values that convey powerful effects on the semiotic potential (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

In the museum's interior space, how an architect chooses to connect the galleries concerns the space between exhibitions, the juxtaposition of walls, along with the colors and lighting chosen. The compositional system of *information value* provides an example of how structural design acts as a semiotic resource. Using the binary relationship of Up/Down the placement of an object in the 'up' position typically signifies a more influential location. Therefore, if an abstract structural element (semiotic resource) of a museum's architecture takes the eye upward, it suggests a specific meaning potential, typically one of importance or power. However, this is not always the case. Bringing in the relationship of Centre/ Margin if an Indigenous peoples gallery is placed at the far end of the museum (the margin) or on the uppermost level, it may signify a different meaning to the source community than what was intended by the architect (van Leeuwen, 2005). Thus, *up* does not necessarily suggest power in the overall context of the semiotic landscape. Using these examples, both the Up / Down and Center / Margin can communicate the social capital a source community holds with the museum, intended or not.

The above example on the placement of an Indigenous gallery provides information value. It also suggests a semiotic relationship in regards to the rest of the museum as the Indigenous gallery's position could be read as '*framing*' its identity within a national agenda. At the L1 layer, framing defines these larger spatial elements (boundaries or empty spaces) and it examines at how exterior and interior elements connect to each other. It looks for vectors that connect or disconnect the various exhibitions.

At the L1 layer, the coherence of the three systems of composition provides a tool to analyze the exterior and interior elements of the museum's architecture reflected in the photographs taken during my visit to each museum. These components provide part of the answer to questions three and four (RQs 3,4).



### 3.3 THE MUSEUM AS AN INSTITUTION (L2)

The museum is considered as an institution, as its governing body decides its agenda and policy. An institution is defined as, "an organization having a particular purpose, especially one that is involved in science, education, or a specific profession" (*Oxford Advanced Learning Dictionary* online, 2016). Within an institution, different layers of context can be seen as unequal (Cole 1996), which allows for the creation of boundaries.

L2 highlights the social language used in the mission statement and policy devised by the governing body. The mission statement they shape is developed out of a specific socio-cultural context: it conveys the *social language* of the group (Bakhtin, 1986). The mission statement and other governing documents developed by the museum's governing body play a critical role for how national museums as social institutions define and reflect their "broader commitment to the world in which they operate" (Janes, 2011, p. 54).

To what degree a museum's policy and mission statement integrate inclusiveness has implications for what narratives are chosen for the exhibitions and the relationship between the curator and the source community (Sandell, 2003; Søndergaard and Janes, 2013). Thus, a mission statement becomes a *cultural artifact*, which is a product of human history (Cole, 1996). The history behind it needs to consider national museums are enacted by act of the government, and government officials often handpick appointees to the board. This layer constructs a foundation to answer several of the research questions (RQ 2, 3, 4).

The governing body represents one practice within the museum, which places them within an "as if" *figured world* (Holland et al, 1998) with a distinct voice situated in a specific social and cultural context. L2 addresses the *influence* of the mission statement and policy on a curator's representation of Indigenous peoples via the social language incorporated in the documents. As a figured world, the governing body's identity and agency are formed "dialectically and dialogically" (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 49). The voice of the museum as an institution resonates outward to the source communities as much as it does to practitioners within the museum through the appointment of the museum's board and the social language it uses. The term 'voice' originated from Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky who believed "human communicative practices give rise to mental functioning in the individual" and the "multiple ways of representing reality in approaching a problem" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 13).

The museum's governing body communicates within a specific context that suggests the documents and programs they produce from cultural artifacts. The documents and policies have been "internalized through specific cultural, historical,

and institutional forces” (Wertsch, 2007, p. 178). *Cultural artifacts*, such as mission statements, “shape possibilities for thought and action, and in turn, are shaped by those who use them” (Daniels, et al., 2007, p. 2). Michael Cole (1996) posits “artifacts exist as such only in relation to something else” (p. 144), in this context the mission statement is a historically situated cultural product developed by the board (figured world) and is used as a tool of mediation. The board can act as an active agent through the cultural artifacts (mission and policy) it creates. Through these documents, they can empower diversity in who sits on the board and the museum's hiring practices. In turn, these choices have implications for what and how narratives are presented.

The action of using a mission statement, as a *tool for meditation* changes depending on what actors are involved; thus, the *social language* used plays a critical role (Cole, 1996). The political priorities of the government behind a national museum often influence how policy and missions are stated. National museums, enacted via government mandates, are political institutions that have the ability to impact social change. Governments, through museum appointees, place different priorities on the narratives the museum presents, be it in policy, exhibition or architecture. “Each agent involved in the policy process brings in their own professional and personal values and experiences that can influence implementation”(McCall and Gray, 2014, p. 28). This action creates what is known as cultural mediation.

*Cultural mediation* implies "a mode of developmental change where the activities of prior generations are cumulated in the present . . . only humans can create the conditions needed for development" to take place (Cole, 1996, p. 145)." Thus, he continues, "discourses and practice become ‘tools’ that build the self into context of power." Power is a potential tool at this level as the decisions the governing body makes influence the outcome of actions of the museum practitioners in their various roles. Richard Sandell (2007) discussed how (the), “symbolic power of culture is increasingly acknowledged in museums” (p. 193), and ethical responsibilities for its use have started to be taken seriously.

Thus, the social language of the governing body trickles down to the curator's role and has implications for the overall moral agency (Marstine, 2011) of the museum. For example, the museum's mission and policies have the ability (and the responsibility) to provide a mediational means to break down potential boundaries with source communities *if* the social language used promotes inclusion. The actions of the governing body are dependent on who is appointed to it. *If* appointees are handpicked by the government to represent their interest, the language used to set policy may not be representative of the nation's population. This creates a relational aspect between the museum's policy and mission statement and how curators work with the source community. It could also have an effect on how willing the source community is to collaborate with the museum. These concerns are investigated in research questions (RQ3, 4), L3 and L4.

The mission statement plays a significant role in conveying the museum's role in society through the language it uses. It also points to a process that involves more than just the governing body and museum practitioners, and emphasize its what form of relationship it has with its public (Macdonald, 2003). Additionally, it is a link to a museum's transparency and prompts questions about the moral choices it makes and why (Gardner, 2004; Marstine 2011).

### 3.4 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3)

The increased awareness of the power of culture has opened questions of meaning and identity, all of which are fundamental to learning. Informal learning in museums is provided through visual narratives of exhibitions presenting views of both the past and present (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). It is *through* these narratives that national museums have the ability to create change in how historical events define “nation.”

Curators as *can be* change agents if they design, construct, and frame accurate national narratives and not ones that are merely politically correct (Kreps, 2008, 2011, 2014; Marstine, 2011; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013; Lonetree, 2012). The narrative curators present provide a reflection of a their moral agency (Marstine, 2011). Indigenous communities have “begun to challenge traditional museological paradigms of cultural representation” by questioning who has the power and authority to speak for and represent them (Kreps, 2003). More recently, Hopper-Greenhill (2007) stated:

*The integration of geographically distant peoples into the history of Europe enabled the picturing of these peoples as the still surviving (though only just) bottom most layer of the archaeological make-up of modern people. . . . Intellectual frameworks such as these still permeate much of the thinking that can be found in the museum field today (p.195).*

The visual composition of the narrative of an exhibition provides one facet of change; another comes from the social process of the exhibition’s development and whose voice is represented. The process involves a different but interrelated layer of learning, which is the activity of communication and mediation between the curator and the governing body, and the curator and the source community represented. Voice can be determined through the compositional systems within an exhibitions semiotic landscape and a curator's social language within the museum’s social landscape. Whose voice dominates the exhibition narratives begins to answer research questions three and four (RQs 3 and 4).

### 3.4.1 A CURATOR'S SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE

The curator's choice of specific objects from the museum's collection (semiotic resources) adds a subjective element to the visual narrative presented: "Different contexts of meaning are invoked by the different assemblages that are produced" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p.2). The physical activity of creating exhibits, the choice of objects, photographic images, texts, and other semiotic resources (color, light), involve the designation of meaning and raise questions on whose interpretation is presented (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). These various visual and spatial considerations have "implications for conceptions of identity" (Macdonald, 2003, p.3).

In this layer the semiotic landscape and its compositional properties move from the overall architecture of the building to that of the specific exhibits within exhibitions and the meaning embedded in them by the curator(s). The principles of each system of the composition remain the same as in L1 but go from a macro level to a micro one. Thus, the terminology used at this layer is specific to a curator's process of developing an exhibition. How individual exhibits and the contents in them are *linked* becomes a semiotic resource; therefore, an exhibition design can be viewed as a visual "communication with meaning based potential" (Kress, 2010, p. 6).

The curator, as a producer of an exhibit's composition, is the focus of the L3 layer. Van Leeuwen (2005) reminds us that any given *semiotic resource* in describing its *semiotic potential* will suggest different meanings. Just like a word listed in a dictionary may have several meanings so too can objects: as the context changes so will the meaning potential of the object. If a curator is unfamiliar with an object's history, it could be problematic and create a disconnect in its meaning potential. *Framing* at this layer allows individual elements in each exhibit and exhibition to be understood as having specific roles within the composition. It provides the context for ideologically based narratives that affect our understanding of what is included (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005).

Often the architectural design of the exhibition space creates framing challenges for curators. Just as in L1, components of architectural design, such as color, lighting, and structural details (curving walls, abstract dimensions, ceiling heights, window placement) affect how the exhibitions *visual rhythm* and *reading path* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Visual rhythm can be found when the objects and text are connected (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) and when one exhibition composition links with the one next to it. The rhythm of the composition relates to how the narrative is presented. When the compositional systems of each exhibit are linked, they provide a coherent narrative throughout the entire exhibition.

*Framing* is as much about what elements are left out of a frame as what was included. An example is provided by a December 2016 visit I had to an exhibition on South African Art at the British Museum in London. The exhibition provided a

chronological history that began with a large panel of rock art from eastern South Africa and other artifacts dating back more than 77,000 years and moved into contemporary art forms. A text next to the panel provided a Western narrative that failed to incorporate information of an expedition in the 1800s that chopped up panels for museums, and due to mining the sites no longer exist.<sup>3</sup> The text stated the panel “naturally fell” to the ground and was retrieved by the museum to protect it. The large panel was presented as a solitary piece against a black background and the images highlighted by a spotlight that provided a salient opening frame for the exhibition. However, the frame was fractured as the text provided a somewhat glorified “settler” sentiment. This is one of several examples of incomplete colonial settler narratives conveyed in the exhibition. Article Three discusses this point further in Chapter Six.

*Salience* provides a hierarchy of the elements in the composition. According to van Leeuwen (2005), the elements of a composition are balanced based on their “visual weight”(p. 198). The weight derives from the salience of each element and its relationship to the other elements. Thus if a curator places a variety of objects on pedestals of different heights and depths, there is a “trade off relationship between factors” of size, color contrast, what is in focus or highlighted, and placement in the visual field (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 202). As in the example of the rock art panel, a beam of light focused on an object or a group of related objects may change its weight or value. Another example would be if an object were in the lower portion of an exhibit, its *information value* would be limited, but if a spotlight highlighted the object, its value and weight would increase. This shows the interrelationship between the three compositional systems.

Kress (2010) considers exhibits as designs, where the producer has a specific aim to show objects, tell stories, and provide reconstructions that may be for cultural or political purposes. However, depending on *who* is involved in the design has implications for the how the composition is framed. If the producer's voice continues to promote a specific side of the nation's history, it questions the degree of a museum's shift to being more socially inclusive. The results from Kress's research at museums in London and Stockholm indicated that “it was clear” the exhibits designed by the curators and their teams were “*framed by policies* of the museum” (Kress, 2010, p. 39). His findings suggest a relational aspect between this layer and L2. Kress' research focused on visitor learning in museums but can extend to incorporate the voices influencing a curator's choices.

Boundaries can form based on how objects or other elements are integrated into an exhibit's compositional systems (information value, salience, framing) and fragment the intended meaning. Boundaries form when there is no clear link between the objects or text in an exhibition, or if the wrong meaning is implied due to a lack of contextual cultural knowledge about the objects on display. Boundaries can arise in how information is placed. The representation of Indigenous peoples

needs to consider that they view the world as cyclical not linear as it is in a Western context (Smith, 2012).

This could add to the complexity of a curator's development of the exhibition's composition. The binary systems of information value suggest a linear view. For example, the left position is for Given information and the right position is for New information (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). This placement reflects a linear view of communication. All of these semiotic resources can provide "alternative meanings" (Marstine, 2011), and acknowledgment that social semiotics was derived from Western context. Different social groups might present information differently (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

The various elements of an exhibition combine to create a *composition*, and in turn, the coherence of the composition becomes a tool to analyze the exhibitions. Analysis of the images of the exhibition's composition should reflect the semiotic landscape of the museum and help answer research questions three and four (RQs 3 and 4).

### 3.4.2. A CURATOR'S SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Designing museum exhibitions is a complex process, and when it relates to representing a nation's Indigenous peoples it requires a curator to be sensitive to their needs (Kreps, 2009, 2015). This suggests a curator, as a practitioner in the museum, needs to acknowledge the voice expressed through the governing body's policy, his or her personal values, and the vision and values of society the museum is situated. Political implications on the governing body (L2) may have a causal effect on *how* and *what* the curator presents in an exhibition's composition (L3) *and* may have broader repercussions for how a source community represented (Sandell, 2003; Marstine, 2011). The shared objective between the governing body and the curators is the creation of exhibitions providing national narratives. From a CHAT standpoint, this is called the *object motive* (Edwards, 2006). The theoretical terminology used in this section pertains to the specific context of a curator.

This section draws on the notion of *social language* (Bakhtin, 1986) uttered by a particular group within an institution (e.g., a curator,) with a specific viewpoint. Wertsch (1993, 1998) argues that in every situation there is heterogeneity of voices. Therefore, communication at both the L2 and L3 layers considers "moral agency" *and* how the curators along with the governing body embrace the concept of shared authority to present politically correct exhibitions (Marstine, 2011; Kreps 2015). In other words, it speaks to a communication cycle that requires a process of give and take to breakdown any barriers (Edwards, 2010), and an understanding of how that process of cooperation and collaboration affects an exhibition's narratives. The values of the governing body, as a specific culture, are communicated through the

functions they produce and how they are brought into use (Edwards, 2010), in this layer, the context of their influence is via the curators.

L3 aims to realize two things based on the social language used by the curators interviewed for this thesis; (1) the impact of one figured world on another; and (2) how *shared expertise* and working relationally “can expand understandings of *how phenomena and responses are mediated* (Edwards, 2010, p. 138, italics added), to achieve a common goal. Edwards suggests that by looking at the process of cooperation moves the focus from questions of *who*, *where*, and *how* to “additionally question *what* is the knowledge to be found in practices” (p. 138).

Vygotsky (1981) developed a mediation triangle to show the fundamental relation of the individual to the environment that arises with artifact mediation (figure 3.1.). The point is to view human action as a complex tension between the active agent and the cultural tool (Wertsch, 1998). To better understand the process of shared authority for curators (and governing boards) in the complex activity of developing exhibition narratives, understanding the mediation process and reflecting on it will be of value.

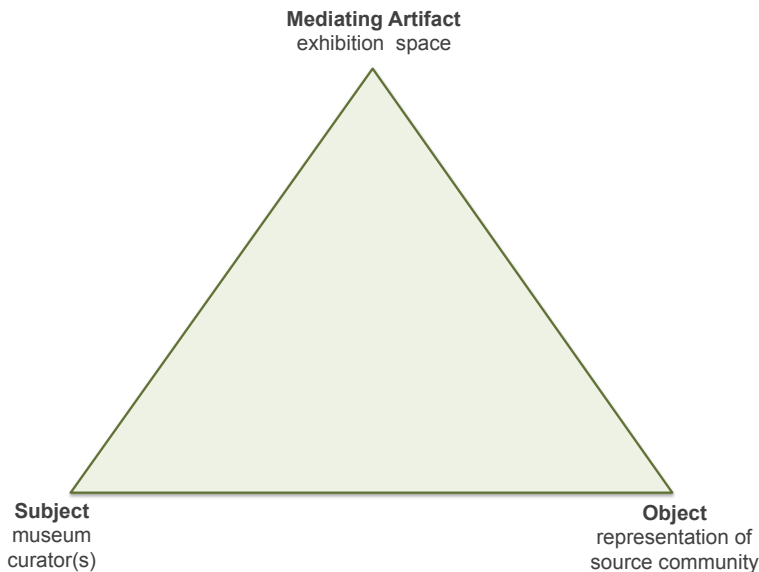


Figure 3.1. The basic meditational triangle for A3, adapted from Cole 2003, p. 119.

In the *meditational triangle* (Fig. 3.1), the top represents the *artifact*, which includes social others, artifacts, and prior knowledge. The lower right corner is the *object*, which is the goal of the activity (and in turn the motive); and on the lower

left corner is the subject, who is the individual(s) involved in the goal (Cole, 1996). Edwards (2007a) sees the triangle as a way to understand how "the world is transformed through our actions upon it"(p.5). The actions, she refers to, includes "the conceptual and material resources" used while sense is being made of the object (Edwards, 2007a, p. 5). If the *object* becomes a joint action, other sources and concepts are brought in to achieve the problem space of the object, in this example, the representation of a source community in an exhibition.

In Figure 3.1 the subject(s) would be the curators (either the 'museum' curator *or* the source community curator), the mediating artifact would be the exhibit space and narrative, and the object would be providing an accurate representation of the source community. For example, the *subject* (the figured world of a curator) holds the expertise or chosen point of view on the representation of the *object/motive* (exhibition), and the *meditational tool (artifact)* becomes the governing documents. The object (exhibit) moves from being seen as an initial problem to solve to be an outcome due to meditational means between the curator and the museum's policies. Therein, the meditational action that leads to the apex of the triangle is cultural (Cole, 1996, p.119).

The individual aspects of the triangle, as a representation of mediated action in a social context, cannot stand-alone as they need to be taken as a whole—what artifacts are appropriate, what mediation is involved, and the implication of the action on the outside world (Cole, 1996). Edwards (2010) refers to the research of Marianne Hedegaard (2009), she reminds us that "institutional practices are historically formed" and affect how the actors in them experience and become manipulated by them (p. 139). Therefore, Hedegaard suggests there is a need to pay "attention to the motives that shape both practices and action within activities within practices" (in Edwards, 2010, p. 140).

Regardless of a curator's individual perspectives, he or she must uphold the museum's values while *at the same time* offer his or her specific level of expertise in collaboration with the source communities. In this way, the exhibitions can be considered *cultural tools* as they mediate a specific representation of "nation." The curator, as a figured world, "provides the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted," and "provides the loci in which people develop identities" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 60). The "voice" a curator chooses to present in exhibition representation can either be one of authoritative *expertise* or one in collaboration with the source community represented. Depending on which voice dominates provides a correlation with a curator's moral agency (Marstine, 2011).

*Mediated action* is a means of *interpersonal* communication that involves the "interaction between the individual and the mediating artifacts/tools" (Edwards, 2010, p. 16). Based on the interpersonal communication between two practices, or



as-if figured worlds (Holland, et al., 1998), the action of mediation develops new and different signs to help make meaning of the world. The sign can be transformed into a cultural artifact /tool that now has value within the activity of mediation between participants that can come closer to accomplishing the object of the activity: a museum's accurate representation of the source community. At this layer, the interpersonal communication is of the governing body and the curators.

The position of “museum curator” situates him or her socially and culturally in the institution of a museum. The curator placed in an “as if” *figured world* (Holland et al., 1998) places him or her in a certain social position within a museum’s hierarchy. In other words, their *identity* and *social language* carry some authority and power (Holland, et al., 1998; Edwards, 2010). Acting within a figured world, curators have the ability to make choices and create change. Therefore, the artifacts the curator chooses to represent source community act as “semiotic mediators that reflect identity” (Holland and Lachiotte, Jr., 2007, p. 125). The concept of ‘figured world’ provides a lens through which to view how different areas of *expertise* become salient in the relationships between people and the practices they inhabit (Edwards, 2010).

Edwards (2007a), views the role *relational agency* plays as dependent on the situation, as “it lies in the individual and in the affordances available for action”(p. 6). It also relates to “the capacity to recognize how others interpret and react to problems and align their interpretations and responses to them” (Edwards, 2010, p.2) to produce an outcome. Thus, relational agency may play a bigger role in attaining the object *if* a curator is situated in an environment where the museum through its mission and policy affords moral agency (Marstine, 2011) in how a source community is represented.

This suggests the influence of curator’s actions by the institution of the museum. However, current museology suggest if need be, that a curator should challenge the institution's motives particular when it comes to issues around inclusiveness. Tacitly it implies a place where a strong sense of agency and identity is necessary by practitioners, such as curators, who need to collaborate across organizational boundaries (Edwards, 2006).

### 3.4.2.1 Summary of L3

In summing up, two theories used on L3 ascertain different aspects of the curator’s role both focusing on the narratives. Social semiotics suggests the composition of an exhibit and what surrounds it can frame narratives as well as create boundaries. Various semiotic resources can be used to affect the message dependent on the context of the narrative and for whom it is intended. For example, an African mask can provide multiple meanings: "as an ethnographic exhibit, a tribal artifact, a piece

of art, evidence of colonial looting, or a commodity to sell" (Mason, 2005, p. 203). In other words, meanings are dependent on the context.

CHAT allows the role of the curator to be seen as a 'figured world' with a specific expertise and object goals that may differ from that of the museum as an institution. This level suggests that the degree mediation that occurs between L2 and L3 is related to the historically formed social language used in the museum's policies (as cultural artifacts), which may influence on the curator's representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples. The question of whose voice dominates such a relationship is important (Edwards, 2010) and incorporates the role manipulation plays.

### 3.5 THE CURATOR AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY<sup>4</sup> (L4)

To understand the curator's role in representing Indigenous peoples one needs to consider the involvement of source communities. This section continues the previous discussion by placing the role of the source community curators as a third *figured world*. Thus, the theoretical terms are now used in the context of the source community. It explores how the expertise of a source community is mediated with the expertise of a museum curator in creating representative exhibitions of their culture and history in a national context. It considers alternative ways of knowing that include intangible artifacts. The foremost concern of this layer is to understanding the *inter*-relational aspects of the museum's policy, a curator's representation of source communities, and how the community's voice is representing in an exhibition. This layer provides a framework to answer research question four (RQ4) and provides reflection on RQs two and three.

The Literature Review (Chapter Two) acknowledges that Indigenous peoples continue to be disempowered culturally and politically (Atalay, 2006; Marrie, 2009; Grieves, 2009; Lonetree, 2012; Smith 2012). Sandell (1998) suggested museums continue to marginalize when they fail to provide narratives of Indigenous peoples by excluding them from the participation of their own representation. A shift should be taken by museums to develop ways that "communities could be empowered and take part in the decision making process" (Sandell 2003, p. 55). Kreps (1998) refers to this as *Indigenous curation*. Therefore, reflecting on the social language used in the museum's mission statement and the curator's interview provides a glimpse into the extent the museum empowers the communities it serves. The role social language (L2 and L3) plays suggests a correlation to how a source community is involved with their representation in museums.

A key to L4 lies in the Western framework museology was formulated on: that of one knowledge system (Kreps, 2015). To begin with, the term “objects” is Western and has a different meaning than the term artifact. For Indigenous peoples artifacts (*not objects*) are sacred, symbols of status in the tribe, living entities, and family heirlooms. Consequentially, there is an interrelationship between ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing that exist in the ontology of each Indigenous group (Grieves, 2009, Martin and Mirraboopa, 2009; Lonetree, 2012, Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013; Kreps 2015). Outside this knowledge, meanings placed on objects are merely imposed, which perpetuates a colonized presence on them (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2009; Smith, 2012; Lonetree, 2012).

Without the insight of the community being represented, such unfamiliarity can be problematic and create additional boundaries between the source community and the museum. Kreps (2015) provides an example of a ‘treasure box’ of the Kwakwaka'waka people of coastal British Columbia, Canada. A curator with no knowledge of the artifact's history or cultural significance would place the box in a Western context stripped of its multisensory and intangible elements and reduce it to an “object for the eyes” (p.8-9). Without the active participation of the source community with a museum curator, the artifact has little value.

In placing the source community as a *figured world* it recognizes them as being “socially and culturally constructed” and different than the figured worlds of the curator or the governing body (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Each as-if figured world allows for the *co-production* of activities and artifacts—such as an exhibition—that is formed and reformed as relational expertise is shared and the development process of the object of activity (the representation of the community in an exhibition) evolves. However, Holland et al., (1998) caution that those involved can “get caught in tensions between past histories that have settled in them” (p. 4); thus, a way out of this is through the mediation of cultural artifacts that can cross over “predetermined powers of rigid practice” (Edwards, 2010, p. 147). This suggests that meditation of a shared object of activity between curators and source communities could provide a means to breakdown any boundaries.

One potential boundary would relate to Indigenous peoples suspicions of a museum’s intentions (West and Cobb, 2005; Lonetree, 2012; Smith, 2007; Smith, 2012; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013). If a museum's governing body implements a policy of inclusion, its curators along with the source community curators have an easier route to establishing trust with one another by respecting values and ideas different than their own. Their communication sets a framework to develop a means of long-term collaboration for the common goal (objective) of presenting the voice of First Nation communities in the exhibit (Conaty and Carter, 2005). Good communication is necessary. The inferred meaning provided by the terminology in the museum policies creates a starting point for such communication.

Another potential boundary is the importance of intangible artifacts. Indigenous peoples pass down knowledge through each generation. Michael Cole (1996) refers to "*eidetic memory*" or "picture memory" – the ability to being able to recall with great accuracy where memory does not "undergoes historical change" (p. 113). Wertsch (1998) preferred the term *collective remembering* that places emphasis on the mediated action and considers the cultural tools used to remember the past. Wertsch (1998, 2007) divides collective remembering into two forms of mediation: an explicit linguistic form such as narratives that represent the past and forms of mediation that rely on less explicit linguistic representation and more on embodied practices. Wertsch's term seems more applicable when referring to Indigenous peoples ways of remembering.

However, the use of the term 'collective' can also be problematic, as the term implies a group has only one identity. For example, the term Indigenous peoples include 'Native Americans,' which collectively represents hundreds and hundreds of very *different tribal affiliations* from Northern Canada and Alaska to the tip of Tierra del Fuego in southern Chile and Argentina. Collective remembering is not homogenous. Penuel and Wertsch (1995) suggests:

*Identity is conceived as a form of action that is first and foremost rhetorical, concerned with persuading others (and oneself) about who one is and what one values to meet different purposes; express or create solidarity, opposition, difference, similarity, love, friendship and so on. It is always addressed to someone who is situated culturally and historically and who has a particular meaning for individuals. . . . Identity is about realizing and transforming ones purpose using signs to accomplish meaningful action (p. 91).*

The quote above provides a connection to the basic meditational triangle presented in L3; however, a few changes need to be made (Fig. 3.2). Within this layer, the *subject* becomes the source community with specific expertise in their culture (traditional knowledge) as it relates to what is represented in the *object* (exhibition) with the aid of a *meditational artifact* (expertise of museum curator of policy, exhibit space, and the collection).

In the position of *subject*, the Indigenous source communities' act not only as individual agents of a specific group but also as the voice of other agents (i.e., community elders) who may hold the final decision (Hutoitoi, in interview, 2012). This process is part of the give and take of negotiation referred to by Edwards (2010). It extends the time it takes to finalize plans and complete the exhibition.

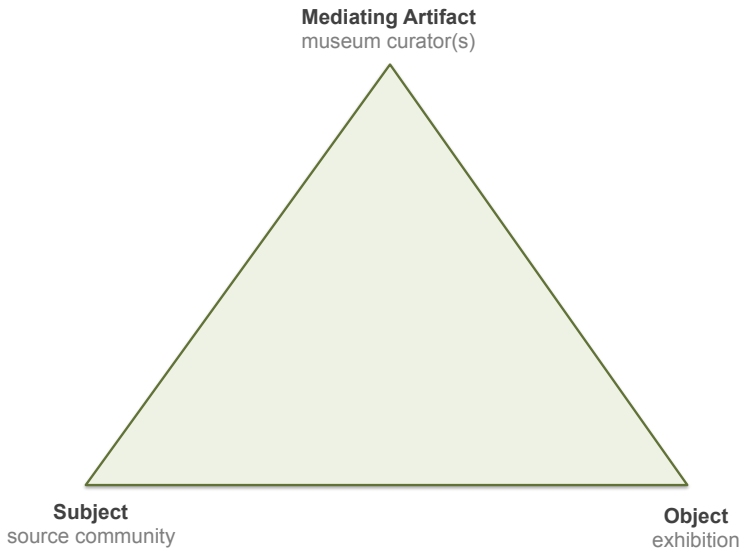


Figure 3.2. The basic meditational triangle for the A4 layer, adapted from M. Cole 2003, p. 119.

Harry Daniels (2008) posits, “just as objects, people can act as mediational artifacts” (p.62). Thus, the museum curator plays that role. The different levels of expertise of the source community curator and the museum curator suggest the cultural and social motivation for the object (exhibit) may be different. Thus, as Wertsch (1998) suggests, there is a natural link between the action and the cultural, institutional, and historical context where the mediation occurs. The mediation between two figured worlds depends on how the *relational agency* and *relational expertise* is developed between the two over the timeframe of working together on the *object motive*.

From this, we can concur that both curators and source communities may have a different aim for the ‘object’ in the meditational triangle. Leont’ev (1978) claims that the object is the key to providing a “determined direction” or its “true motive” (in Edwards, 2010, p. 7). Motives and interests are embedded in and give shape to practices; thus, if both worlds have different motives the process of mediation needed to bring together both worlds becomes more complex. Once a direction is agreed on, it creates a means of keeping the two different views together while moving forward with one determined action: in other words, it creates *relational agency* (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005). Mediation of *cultural artifacts* becomes a factor in the process. For Edwards (2010) the vital question becomes the issue of who has the greatest influence or voice. *Explicit mediation* involves intentionally

presenting what the 'object' is—what task is designated to be accomplished or learned (Wertsch, 2007). If curators and source communities have built trust and established a solid relationship, there is a greater chance mediation is explicit and fewer difficulties will arise in the negotiation process.

Relational agency is a critical aspect of any negotiations that take place between the two 'worlds.' It is dependent on the amount of trust established and how it transforms individual expertise into shared expertise that *slowly* breaks down boundaries and builds lasting relationships (*cf.*, Conaty and Carter, 2005; Smith, 2012; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013). It is a process that involves constant negotiation. Whose voice leads in the mediation process affects the outcome of the exhibit. It hints at the potential power plays that are entangled in the boundaries between the museum curator and the community curator.

There seems to be little means of assessing the process of appropriate museology (Kreps, 2008, 2015); the basic meditational triangle provides a means of visually breaking down the curator's process of representation in exhibits to simplified components of subject, object, and meditational artifact (s). The curator, governing body, or source community curator(s) can use the knowledge of the process to analyze what worked and what did not. The outcome being a win-win-win and furthermore provides a means for curators' to influence the museum. In new museology or post-museum concepts, the relationship between curators and the source communities is vital not only for representational concerns but as part of the museums' developing societal function (Sandell, 2007; Janes and Conaty, 2005; Knell, 2012; Marstine, 2006).

### 3.6 SUMMARY

How a curator represents a source community is not dependent on the curator alone. It would be simplistic to consider the research questions only through a curator's voice. The concept of 'figured worlds' provides an approach to understanding three different but related cultural worlds where each 'world' has a specific expertise that influence a curator. If shared, the expertise works together to attain a mutual goal: an accurate representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples. The relational agency between each figured world creates motivation when subjects move from one context into another, as the structure of their personal relevance changes (Edwards, 2010).<sup>5</sup> If museum curators and source community curators do not establish a shared level of motivation than the 'voice' that prevails will likely continue to be the power voice of the museum versus empowering the voice of the source community. The concept of "figured worlds" acknowledges the social positioning, identity, and boundaries of each practice. With the addition of the concepts of *relational agency* and expertise, meditational aspects between the social and cultural worlds can be better understood (Edwards, 2005, 2010).

The overriding aim of the thesis focuses on the curator's role in meaning making that involves an array of voices. Two theories were presented. Social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) and the concept of *semiotic landscape*, provides a means to 'read' the overall coherence of the composition of the architecture and exhibition space as semiotic resources involved in a curator's meaning making process. CHAT provides a socio-cultural-historical approach and sees experiences as being socially constructed realities where focus is placed on mediation between various practices in the meaning making process. Communication through the social language of the *social landscape* and the visual language used in compositional systems of the semiotic landscape help understand how the process of meaning making in an exhibition evolves.

Four layers for theoretical analysis were developed. *The Building's Architecture* (L1) examined how the design of a museum building makes meaning via its the compositional systems of its semiotic landscape. The second layer, *The Museum as an Institution* (L2), developed the argument that the word choices used by the governing body (figured world) in the mission statement and policy (cultural artifact) has influence on the work of the curator and how the museum involves the source communities. The third layer, *The Curator as an Exhibitor* (L3), considered meaning making from how semiotic resources provide different affordances in the composition of exhibitions, *and* how the social language used by a curator (figured world) influences the process of creating an exhibition that accurately reflects the nation's Indigenous peoples. It brought in relational agency from the L2 layer, suggesting the mission statement and policy influence the curator's voice. The fourth layer, *The Curator and The Source Community* (L4), placed the source community as a figured world to better understand the boundaries, building trust, and different ways of knowing create complexities and influence the narratives presented. Each figured world is situated in a specific social and cultural context. The social language of the mission statement and the museum curator has implications for the success in achieving the object—the representation of the source community's voice in an exhibition.

Communication (visual or social language) provides a common thread between the layers. Learning is situated in the communication and the mediation that takes place between layers. How communication transpires is based on the social and cultural worlds each layer is situated (L2- L4). Culturally held understandings are mediated by language and by the way artifacts are used (conceptual or material), so mediation involves more than one person (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005). Learning includes the capacity to "take control of one's world" by understanding "the trajectories and social practices which shape and are shaped by them" (Edwards and MacKenzie, 2005, p. 289). The increase and shared knowledge of each figured world develops through a process of active participation where mediation is central to achieving the goal. It is the process of attaining the *shared* goal that learning takes place. Vygotsky posits that change occurs as new structures of consciousness emerge and

old defunct relationships fade away. The person then becomes a repositioned agent within the practices he or she inhabits (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the social landscape of CHAT has consequences for the outcome of a museum's semiotic landscape. There is a relational aspect between the two theories.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Quote source. Bright Hub Education. Famous Quotes from Native Americans a different historical perspective. <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/social-studies-help/123924-famous-quotes-from-native-americans-historical-perspective/>
2. Øustein Gilje's (2009) investigated how various forms of digital production, including cutting and pasting of 'GOOGLED' material and traditionally recorded materials. He was interested in how students learn from downloading software and remixing it with edited software, where this activity is one of cultural expression where learning takes place by taking culture apart and putting it back together. Carey Jewitt is known for her work with multimodality and collaboration with Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.
3. Information from an interview with Sven Ousman, Iziko South African Museum, Cape Town, 14 May 2012.
4. The concept and need for this level developed towards the end of the research. It should be noted, during the research process I intentionally had no contact or information from *source communities* as my focus was placed *solely on the curator*: thus, working with source communities was out of the scope of this research. In the context of representation of Indigenous peoples, I have relied on the writings of Indigenous researchers to provide a voice different from my own. The level is important as it provides a means of analysis not only of what is represented in the exhibit by how and by whom that representation is developed.
5. Taken from personal notes during of a weeklong summer course taught by Professor Anne Edwards at the University of Oslo in August of 2013 where I was a participant



# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

*“Do you want to live again after you die, and come up again?”<sup>1</sup>  
-Kunyanda Shikamo,!Xun*

## 4.1 AN OVERVIEW

To accomplish the aim of investigating the voices that influence a curator's meaning making process in exhibits representing a nation's Indigenous peoples a multiple case study approach (Stake, 2005) was incorporated using qualitative empirical methods. The research took place across four different *inter*-national contexts (United States, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa) to build on existing knowledge and relevant literature to examine the curator's role in representing Indigenous peoples in a national museum context. The literature on museology suggests many researchers find the representation of Indigenous peoples in museums' leans towards being univocal instead of pluralistic (Marstine, 2006, 2011; Hooper-Greenhill 2000a, Krebs, 2003, 2005; Sandell, 2002, 2003, 2005). Others push for museums and their curatorial teams to be more inclusive and socially responsible (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a; 2007; Sandell, 1998, 2002; Marstine, 2011; Sandell & Nightingale 2012; Janes 2007, 2010, 2011, 2013). In part, this reflects how a museum's incorporates the new museology, which created changes in the job description of a 'curator' (Bunch, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000a; Macdonald, 2003; Marstine, 2011; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013; McCall and Gray, 2014). Thus, this cross-comparative research places itself within the international museological discussion on the social inclusivity of national museums as it pertains to its representation of Indigenous peoples; thus, it is both timely and relevant.

The thesis foci are on what voices influence a curator's meaning making process. Current trends in museum research define museums as institutions of learning where the transmission of its message is dependent on the curator's choices on the content of displays (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b, 2007; Macdonald, 2003; Kreps, 2003, 2015; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013; McCall and Gray, 2014). In a national museum context, this suggests that the narratives chosen provide a lens a country's national consciousness. Yet, the narrative presented is not always one that is inclusive or one that offers challenging political narratives of history (Smith, 2012; Smith, 2007; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013).

Qualitative research was chosen as it aims to gather information that captures the participant's world and the context of the particular environment in which they

occur (Morris, Rockett, and Elechi, 2014). It provides a form of “systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (Shank, 2002, p. 5) that see researchers as making an effort to understand others experience (Morris, et al., 2014). During the research for this thesis, curators were interviewed in the comfort zone of the museum and within the social role (or voice) of being a ‘curator.’ In this environment, as the researcher, I was in a position to play a minimal role (as observer and interviewer, as the ‘visiting team’) and allowed the research participants to be the primary actors (as interviewees on the ‘home team’). This process allowed for a more holistic view (Miles and Huberman, 1994). However, within this approach, as the researcher, I still needed to operate with caution ethically. As a qualitative interviewer, I could have easily leaned towards providing more subjective versus objective measurements used in quantitative methodologies.

Qualitative research provided the means to understand the *how* and *why* curators create exhibitions and present certain narratives. One of the key attributes of qualitative research is that it is flexible, iterative and inductive. This allowed me, as the researcher, to make constant adjustments to the procedures (Stake, 2005; Schutt, 2012; Guest, Namey, and Mitchell, 2013) as needed. To illustrate this, figure 4.1 presents numerous triangles, with the upper and lower triangles designating two integrated research areas:

- (1) The aims and framework as related to the questions (the conceptual 1st step)
- (2) The methods and validity as related to the questions (the operational 2nd step)

The research questions are centrally located as they connect to the other components in the design. The connections between components provide a certain amount of leeway; thus, they are not fixed. Maxwell uses an apt metaphor of rubber bands to explain the degree of flexibility that is built into the qualitative design. Multiple times, during the research process, adjustments were made as new data was incorporated and analyzed. In the figure (4.1), the dotted lines signify the relevant connections between the aims, methods, and framework and what aspects of validation were needed (Maxwell, 2005).

My goal was not necessarily to provide comprehensive in-depth findings but to develop perspectives for further study (Yin, 2014). This thesis dealt with specific curators in a certain type of museum during a specific timeframe (historical and physical). Thus, replication of the same approaches would not necessarily produce the same results. Additionally, if I were to re-conduct this research, I would bring a different set of values and knowledge than I had during the last five years of working on it, and it would be historically placed in a different time.

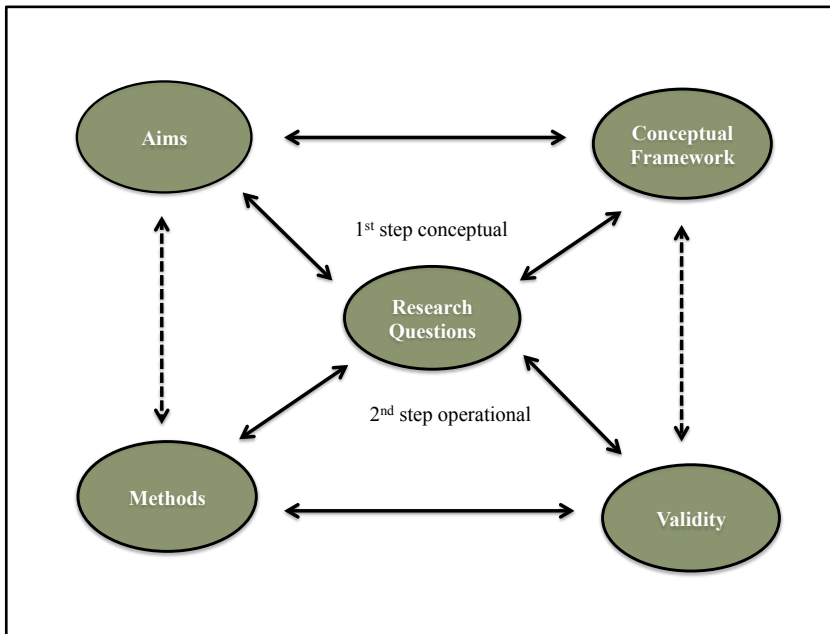


Figure 4.1 *Qualitative Research Design: An interactive model adapted from Maxwell (2005, p. 5).*

## 4.2 EPISTEMOLOGY: WORLDVIEW PERSPECTIVE

“The world is made real and is made through peoples actions and thoughts” (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007, p.11). A curator’s background (his or her field of expertise, Western or Indigenous), the political stance of the museum, and the communication and involvement of the source community is combined to reflect the narrative they create in exhibits. Within the context of this thesis, a social-constructivist paradigm places focus on the curator’s actions and thoughts.

The use of two theories looked at communication from two angles: the semiotic landscape and the social landscape. The theory of social semiotics (*semiotic landscape*) was used to analyze the compositional systems of the museum’s architecture (architects voice) and the exhibitions (curator’s voice). Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) helped to analyze the *social landscape* through the social language used by the museum’s governing board (mission statement) and the curator’s (his or her interview). This provided a means to analyze how the curator understands his or her role and what “voices” influence the curator’s meaning making process. How do these “voices” of from different social languages influence the narratives a curator presents? Communication links the two theories:

one through meaning making via visual compositions as social constructs and the other one through meaning-making via mediational and relational means.

An interpretive approach was taken as the focus is a curator's meaning making process of how they represent the Indigenous peoples of the nation. As a researcher, interpretivism allowed for consideration not only of each curator in the landscape of his or her museum, but also to consider it as it corresponded to the transcribed interviews and the other data collected at each step in the process (Stake, 2005). As new information was added, its analysis was crisscrossed with data already coded and categorized (Spiro, Vispol, Schmitz, Samaraoungavan and Boerger, 1987). Thus, the interviewee's transcribed statements were constantly scrutinized, reinterpreted, recoded, and reflected on as a means of keeping the project ethically and thematically aligned (Cunliffe, 2003).

Constant reflection and reinterpretation allowed a better understanding of how the various components fit together. For example, after reading several annual reports, re-reading transcripts, and checking out uncertain terms that arose in the transcripts led me to news articles and exhibition reviews that could support what was stated. It became a matter of constantly checking one source against another and then searching for further sources to provide a more critical approach. As a researcher, I also became an "instrument" (Schutt, 2012, p. 325). Thus, I needed to balance the volume of information from the curators' interviews in proportion with the other data components, so the scale would not tip too much to one particular data set. Each iteration of research provided a new understanding for the next iteration, which leads to a greater overall knowledge (Alversson & Sköldberg, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004).

The beliefs I had before each interview were not what I held after reflecting on the interviews and visit to each museum. The more I listened to and edited the transcriptions the deeper my understanding of someone else's viewpoint became, silencing some of my previous inferences. This process became an "ongoing cycle" for the research (Schutt, 2012, p. 324). To a degree, the knowledge gained from such encounters became a new point of departure. Walsham (2006) stated, "Interpretive methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors and that this applies equally to the researcher" (p. 320). Another angle to consider in the interpretations that directly correlates to the factors above is Indigenous methodology (Smith, 2012; Lonetree, 2012).

### **4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE STUDIES**

The research design was developed based on the primary aim, allotted time, and resources available. The research parameters were defined further by the elements

needed for each case study *and* comparison between them. Robert W. Stake (2005) suggests that case studies, as a methodology, "have been little honored as the intrinsic study of a valued particular..." (p. 448). Each case provides a contrast and comparison that suggests different influences in a curator meaning making process. Robert K. Yin (2014) refers to multiple case studies as "cross-case synthesis", and suggests that having more than two cases provides the opportunity for the researcher to "strengthen the findings" (p.156). Being able to provide analysis across multiple cases creates the capability to decipher the similarities and differences between them. The aim for this multiple-case study is to provide a better understanding of how curators in different national museums represent of a nation's Indigenous peoples. Additionally, a cross-case synthesis highlights the voice(s) that influence a curator's meaning making process. This form of research allows for a closer look at the social, political, and cultural contexts (Maxwell, 2005) that influence the decision making of curators across different national and cultural contexts.

Stake (2005) proposes that case studies have the "opportunity to be a force in setting public policy and reflect on the human experience" (p. 460). While the aim of this research is not to set policy, it is hoped that it provides a lens to review and reflect the role of museum policy and mission statements on how they relate to the complexity of a curator's position. Stake (2005) developed six concerns for case studies (the portion in *italics*), which have been adapted for this study as follows:

- *The nature of the case*; centered on curators with consideration on other cultural levels within the museum;
- *Its historical background*; 'national', the political establishment of the museum, and its mission, and continued colonial effects on Indigenous peoples;
- *Its physical setting*; museum's architecture, site location, and location of Indigenous galleries;
- *Economic, political and legal contexts*; primarily on political and legal as they relate to museum policy and Indigenous peoples concerns;
- *Other evidence* that refers to this case; reviews on the museum and its exhibits, the museum website, and current updates on museum exhibitions representing Indigenous peoples; and
- *The participants*; the curators whose insight was captured in the interviews, transcribed, and then combined with the overall data collection.

### 4.3.1 SELECTING AND DELIMITING THE CASES

The research began in autumn of 2010 with finding possible theories, reading related literature, and preparing a budget for travel. Concurrently, adjunct teaching and Ph.D. course requirements were met. Visits to museums took place between 2011 and 2013 with follow-up questionnaires sent via email to participating curators in early 2015.

A pilot study at Bornholm's Museum in Rønne, Denmark was completed at the beginning of the research. An interview with the lead archaeologist and curator of the Stone and Bronze Age sections of the museum was conducted. Bornholm is a small Danish island that lies in the Baltic Sea north of Germany and south of Sweden. The island is where most of Denmark's rock art is found due to its geological outcrop which contains more hills and large rocky areas than the rest of the country: a geology shared with much of southern Sweden. The Bornholm Museum is very active in preserving and documenting rock art as part of Denmark's prehistory. This initial foray helped to define the semi-formal interview questions and to explore which additional methods would provide valuable data to understand the curators meaning making process of creating exhibits.

The criterion for choosing the museums was formulated on locations where rock art continues to hold strong cultural association for the descendants of the original makers. Unintentionally, the selection ended up involving colonized nations, which added an interesting angle not considered initially. The final selection for case studies was: The National Museum of Australia, Canberra (two curators); Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongawara*, Wellington (one curator); and Smithsonian's The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. (one curator).

In early 2012, parallel research was conducted at two Scandinavian toy museums on the presentation of toys as a children's cultural heritage. The research also acted as an additional pilot study to further test the design. The research took place at, *Den Gamle By*, Aarhus, Denmark (one curator), and *Leksaksmuseet* Stockholm, Sweden (one curator). The results of this study are discussed in Article One. A second parallel was researched later the same year with an investigation of the representation of rock art in a national context simultaneously to the primary study. The study took place at The Iziko South African Museum, Cape Town (one curator and two consultants), The Origins Centre (one curator/director), and The Rock Art Research Centre (RARI) at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, South Africa (one Director/ curatorial consultant at SAM).<sup>3</sup> The findings from this research are discussed in Article Three. Both articles are presented in Chapter Six.

### 4.3.2 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the case selection finalized, the aim and research questions became:

**Aim:** To understand the various voices that influences the curator's process of meaning making when representing the nation's Indigenous peoples.

- **RQ1:** How does a curator define his or her role?
- **RQ2:** What terms are used in the museum's governing acts, policy, and mission statement? How does the language influence the curator's meaning making process?
- **RQ3:** How are exhibit narratives presented, and who is the curator's intended audience?
- **RQ4:** What narratives are presented in the exhibitions? Do the exhibits provide a voice for a nation's Indigenous peoples or one that is more Eurocentric?

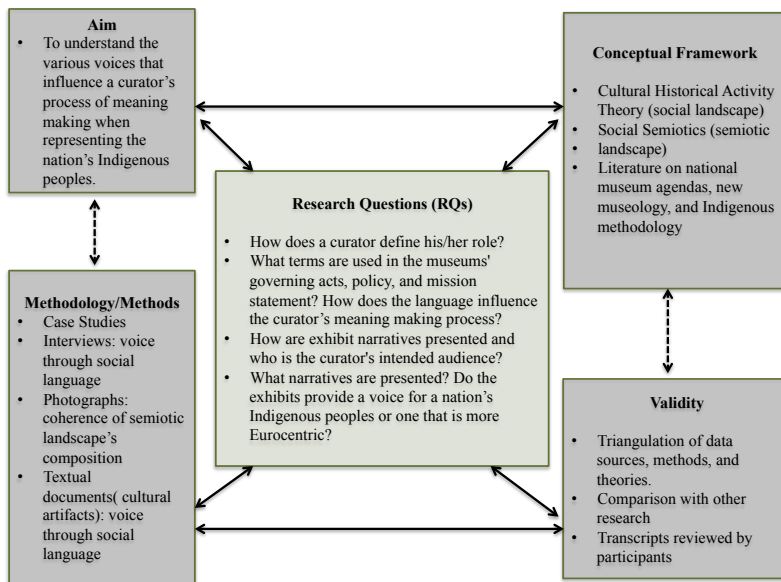


Figure 4.2 Specific Design of Dissertation (modified from Maxwell, 2005, p. 9).

The subsequent sections discuss the various choices made in the research design and the theoretical relationship with the research. The discussion begins with the broadest methodological context before moving on to the actual methods used to collect and analyze data. Figure 4.2 expands on the previous

figure by providing an overview of the various issues as they relate to the initial research design components.

#### 4.3.3. MAKING CONNECTIONS: A QUALITATIVE INTERRELATIONSHIP

Based on the questions and the aims of this research two assumptions framed this research (Yin, 2014). The first, Indigenous curators are more sensitive to the narratives and have a better context to frame the exhibitions representing their culture; and second, political overtones from the governing body museum trickle down to the 'how', 'what', and 'why' curators choose the narratives presented.

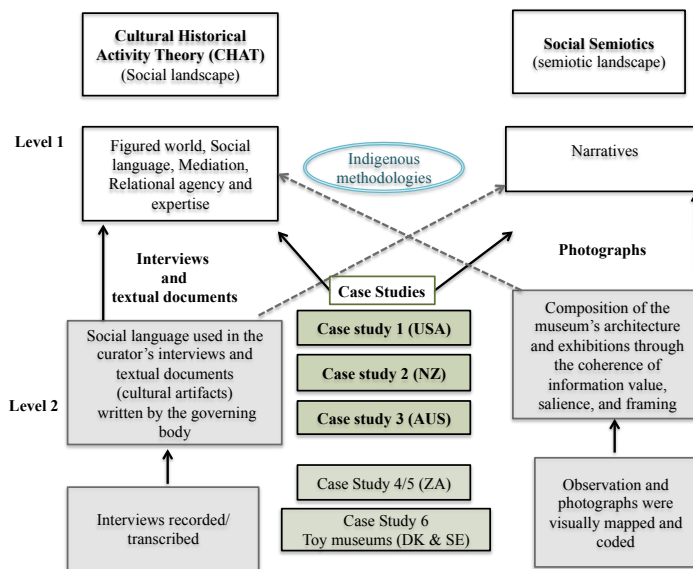


Figure 4.3 Two levels of inference. Findings may support one theory more than the other (Modified from Yin 2014, p. 39).

Figure 4.3 depicts two levels, one theoretical (level 1) and an operational one related to the methods used to collect the data and analyze it (level 2). The figure focuses on the interview with the curator and my visit to the galleries. Additional data was collected to produce proportional amounts of analysis for each theory and to verify comments made by the curators. The figure illustrates a balance of both theories for analyzing two different landscapes (semiotic and social) within the museum and how they influence the curator's representation of a source community. The dash lines indicate where findings from one theory may not support the other. Additionally, concerns stemming from Indigenous methodologies



are positioned above the case studies as a reminder for the need of a holistic approach.

## **4.4 CONSTRUCTION OF DATA COLLECTION**

Method choices centered on case studies and how best to answer the research questions. This section discusses the various methods used; interviews, textual documentation, visual analysis (photographs and mapping): each is described separately along with the form of analysis used. The collection of data began in 2010 and was completed in 2016. It would have been easy to navigate away from the initial aim, as many other avenues could have traveled down. There was a constant need to ‘stay the course’ and not veer off on tangents that became overtly political or slanted to a visitor's perspective.

### **4.4.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

Historically, the process of interviewing began in Ancient Egypt and became popular after the World Wars due to war correspondents (Fontana and Frey, 2005). In this thesis, semi-structured interviews provided the largest volume of data collected both from the standpoint of time and as a primary resource.

Curators from the three national museums were selected from a list of curators for the respective Indigenous galleries. If a list was not available, emails were sent to the head of the curatorial group and then forwarded to the appropriate person(s). Personal contacts were used for curators in the field of archaeology and rock art, with additional contacts found through networking. Contact for the curators who participated in the rock art were made through a personal contact at Gothenburg University's (Sweden) Archaeology Department. The names of the two Toy Museum curators were found on their respective museum websites. They were contacted via an email that described the research goals and the extent of their involvement. While I had previous knowledge of the three rock art researchers/curators from South Africa, I had never met them, nor had I previously met any of the other curators. Overall, ten interviews with curators were conducted.

In setting up the interviews, I presented a brief general background of myself, the framework of the project, and described the curator's involvement. These steps begin the process of developing trust and rapport with the interviewee (Fontana and Frey, 2005). I conveyed to the participants upfront that any article based on the data collected from the museum would be sent for review; however, I was told, in all but one case, this was not necessary. Towards the end of the research, two pre-submitted articles that pertained to each museum (Article 3 to Te Papa and Iziko South African Museum; Article 2 to the National Museum of Australia) were sent to the respective curators along with follow-up questions. The Toy Museum article

was not sent to the two curators as the authors were told it was not necessary; they also did not receive follow-up questions. These steps were done to validate the words recorded in the transcripts were accurately transcribed from the recorded interview.

Interviews were semi-structured to gain the most insight into how and why curators choose to represent certain narratives. To gain additional rapport, I introduced generalities of the research and my initial questions focused on a more general level to gain a background of the participants and how he or she defined their role. The initial introduction was enough to prompt informative answers without the need to interrupt and ask further questions. On a couple of occasions, I had to refocus the participants on the actual research questions.

From my point of view, the curator's were the experts and anything he or she was willing to share with me was valuable information (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). The length of the interviews varied and depended on the time each curator could take out of his or her schedule. Timeframes ranged from thirty minutes to four hours, with an average being one and a half hours. The interviews were conducted as we walked and talked our way through the exhibit, and when time permitted, a 'quiet' interview took place away from the galleries. This method allowed for a more relaxed and open participation on the part of the curators with the interviewer (Fontana and Frey, 2005). The recorded interviews showed the curator's tone of voice changed from one of formality to a more warm open tone by the end.

Towards the end of the research, each national museum curator received an identical short follow-up questionnaire to qualify some of the overriding themes that developed after the interview. Participants in South Africa were asked additional questions regarding the exhibition of rock art due to an article I was writing. The two curators involved in the parallel study on toy museums were not asked any further questions.

#### **4.4.2 PHOTOGRAPHY AS VISUAL BASED RESEARCH**

Visual based research was done with the use of the photographs taken of the exhibition space and the museum architecture. One-thousand photographs were taken, which provided a visual 'memory' record for data analysis (Table 4.1). I captured the images on a hand-held digital SLR camera set for no flash. According to Jon Prosser (1998), this form of research is "undervalued and under-applied by the qualitative research community" (p. 97). Likewise, he suggests the need to consider images are socially created and mediated; therefore, the taking and reading of the images becomes biased from the photographer's personal socio-cultural background. Byers (1964) stated, "cameras don't take pictures, people do" (p. 127). His statement adds to the complexity of using images from both a methodological and theoretical perspective. I chose what images were placed in the viewfinder and

the method I used to analyze each image; thus, it could be construed, that the image is merely subjective and biased of methodology.

Photographs were taken before or after the interview in order not to break its continuity. Prosser (1998) comments on this process stating the use of a camera while walking around with a participant could "influence the rapport" (p. 121) as it would become a distraction of what is being said in the interview for all participants. Some objects or portions of exhibits became more salient than others to my eye. Later in the process this indicated to me that there were parts of exhibits that I wish I had documented but did not. Photographs were taken with a specific context in mind while others were taken as a visual memory to "connect the dots" (Fine and Weis, 2005, p. 66) between one exhibit and another.

Guidelines for taking photographs varied, as did how I was able to frame the images. At Te Papa, close-ups and certain objects were not allowed to be photographed. This was because the Māori culture maintains a high respect for artifacts due to their spiritual ancestral connections. Te Papa was the first national museum visited; however, I acknowledged and respected this tradition and followed it at the other museums I visited.

*Table 4.1: Qualitative data overview*

Location	Interview Time(min.)	Transcription time(initial)	Transcribed pages	Approved PDF	Photographs taken
Bornholm Museum DK (2012)	60	1 week	7	YES	140
Leksaksmuseet, SE (2012)	90	1 week	8	N/A	65
Den Gamle By, Århus, DK (2012)	96	1 week	12	N/A	65
Te Papa, Wellington, NZ (2012)	119	3 weeks	10/13(23)	YES	114
NMA, Canberra, AUS. (2012)	106	3 weeks	23	YES	170
Origins Centre, ZA Johannesburg, ZA (2012)	60	1 week	11	YES	101
RARI WITS Univ. Johannesburg, ZA (2012)	25	4 days	6	YES	N/A
Iziko South African Museum Cape Town, ZA (2012)	242	2 months	36	YES	102
NMAI Washington, D.C (2013)	74	1 week	21	YES	270
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>14 hours 53 min</b>	<b>13 weeks</b>	<b>124</b>		<b>1017</b>

Permission to publish the photographs had to be approved by the media department of each museum. The approval process at Te Papa was more involved than at the

other museums. After the head of their media department reviewed the photographs, I was notified that some of the images had to be sent *directly* to contacts (provided by Te Papa) in various iwis or artists agents for approval. This was because specific objects belonged to one of the iwis or private artists. While this took substantially more time, it was a process I respected and appreciated. It also provided me with a better understanding of the importance of the procedure from a cultural and ethical standpoint. The other museums involved had a more straightforward process of acceptance and filling out and signing the appropriate paperwork. Each figure contains the image credit required by each museum, or artist. Unless otherwise stated, the author of this thesis was the photographer.

#### **4.4.3 TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION**

To support claims by the curator in the interview or my preconceptions various forms of textual documentation were used. It included museum websites, annual reports, mission statements, government documents, and reviews of exhibits. It also provided a foundation for triangulation. Triangulation provides a process for the researcher to be sensitive to the data and the participants while justifying the results (Elliott and Williams, 2001, p.183). Flick (2004) sees triangulation as an *alternative to validation* as it provides the means to gain an in-depth understanding of the different elements in question; thus, it was part of the methodology for providing cross analysis between the various forms of data collected with the aim to provide as objective an outcome as possible.

##### **4.4.3.1 Museum websites**

The respective museum sites were used initially to gain background information on the exhibit to prepare for the interview. Later the website was used to access the annual report and any other relevant information on the museum. The sites were used during the entire process to check and verify information and to note any changes in exhibitions or policy. They were used after each visit to fill in missing information on the exhibitions, provide correct place names during the transcription process, review related audio programs, and to search staff research articles and museum journals (their own) for related information. However, changes occur constantly on the Internet, so the information found in 2012 was often quite different in 2016 when as this was written. Fortunately, I saved a hard copy of the earlier information in a file.

##### **4.4.3.2 Government Documents / Mission Statements**

National museums are inaugurated by a government decree. Thus, government acts that enacted the museum became evidence for any influence national narratives might have on representation within the museum. In addition to government documents, data was collected on newspaper reviews of exhibits, announcements of

the museum opening, and related editorials. Analysis of these documents often presented a counterpoint to what was mentioned in the interviews or described on the museum website. Thus, the political stance of the writer and the publication they were writing for entered into the analysis.

Annual reports provided information on the museums' mission statement, current community work with Indigenous communities, staff and board demographics, and exhibitions plans. Not all annual reports contain the same information nor do they provide the same amount of organizational transparency. This point is discussed further within each case study. Mission statements were compared with government mandates (museum) and with the interview transcripts to investigate any relationship between them and the narratives presented in the exhibits.

## **4.5 EXAMINATION OF DATA**

This section provides the forms of analysis for the semi-structured interviews, image analysis of the photographs, and the textual documentation. Figures and tables depicting the various forms of data are included. The process was iterative as collecting datum and analyzing it were simultaneous. As new analytic steps informed the process of collecting, additional data was added to inform the analytic process (Thorne, 2000, p.68). Yin (2011) concurs, and suggests a five-phase cycle for qualitative analysis: (1) compiling, (2) disassembling, (3) reassembling, (4) interpreting, and (5) compiling. The cycle suggests a non-linear approach where going back and forth between two phases is part of the cycle (p. 177). The section presents the form of analysis for the interviews, images and textual documentation.

### **4.5.1 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS (L3)**

An interview is a "social encounter" and needs to be analyzed as such (Dingwall, 1997, p. 56). It places both the curator(s) and the interviewer in a situated activity where his or her response is essentially a 'role-play' within a given context. This is in line with Gubrium and Holstein's (1998) consideration that interviews are 'storytelling' and seen as a production to accomplish a specific objective (in Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 717). These sentiments were considered while I transcribed and analyzed the interview. I often questioned if a curator might have intentionally left something important out. The curators' interviews provided the heart of the data collection, and provided an analysis of their social language to voice how they worked within the museum's social and semiotic landscape to represent a source community.

First, the interviews provided the social language of each curator within the cultural context of the museum. Placed within a *figured world* (Holland, et al., 1998) each curator's sociocultural background and position within the museum influences the words and information he or she provided. Thus, each voice heard was unique. The words used by each curator, the tone, inflections, and pauses provided the core that dictated what other documentation needed to be collected. Analysis of the interviews focuses on their voice (Wertsch, 1991), their social language, to acknowledge how they identity their role within the museum's social landscape and relational agency (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005), and how what is conveys about their moral agency (Marstine, 2011). Additionally, their comments conveyed how meaning is made through the composition they chose to convey a certain narrative (semiotic landscape).

20:14  
 SO: To make the hole, you take that cone shape stone, and with that stone you from either end, drill drill, and some people have suggested that you put water and sand put in as an abrasive, ah, microwave studies could establish that. A lot of laborious grinding, grinding getting this hourglass shape, this one is flat it was probably used for something else afterwards...they are remarkable artifacts. . . .None of the descendants themselves are making these claims... This is a single...it fits into the whole psychology of denying local authorship.

AJC: You mention there is some spirituality attached with these, do you have to store them in any special way?

SO: No, we have a whole separate set of protocols for human remains.

AJC: In NZ the Maori has a special manner for handling sacred objects.

SO: Yezz, There you have direct and reliable ethnographic information, here where there is no direct ancestry, we had two San intern working with us and we would ask them various things and they would say, "we just don't know, could be, but we don't know".

This exhibition was determined by the cases. These were the cases that were available. The budget for this exhibition was 20,000 RAND. Which is not...

AJC: Not a whole lot.

SO: It paid for the printing and that was about it.

Lines 16-43

Figure 4.4 A sample of the transcript with the curator at the Iziko South African Museum.

In the example (Figure 4.4), the curator from SAM expanded on my comment of how sacred artifacts are handled in New Zealand, and explained the method used in South Africa. He explained the difference was due to the low number of direct descendants of the San that held the same level of knowledge as today's Maori. At some previous point I acknowledged the difference between the two museum's, but it was not until the repetition of hearing it and 'reading' it that I made a notation of *method RQ3/4* in the margin (coding) of the printed version. This process also

began to place some missing pieces of the puzzle together. In this sense, I involved three of Yin's the stages: disassembling, reassembling, and interpretation.

To analyze whose 'voice' I looked for terms of phrases that suggested, "partnership," "collaboration," "consulting," "their words," "getting the balance right," or similar wording. To some extent, these terms suggested moral agency, as did "they are the experts;" or "if we did it wouldn't feel like it was theirs," "our methods reflect the museum's policy" or "the government doesn't really interfere with what is presented." Similarly, examples of terms noting relational agency, "we consult with different community," "we work together," and "often management chooses the theme."

Second, the interview conveyed social language of how the curator composed the exhibition space to represent the narratives of a community. Often the same phrases or words used to communicate the social landscape also referred to the semiotic one. For example, comments on who was involved, the extent a community was involved (i.e., "they're telling me stories"), and what changes it might have placed on the exhibition design (i.e., we grossly misunderstood the physical space," "we tired to create too much in to too little;" "words vs. juxtaposition of objects"). Constraints from the architecture or comments on the location of the exhibition also presented tools for analysis (i.e., "it is curving linear, you don't have options") The language a curator used crossed over into the image analysis of the photographs taken in the exhibit.

In Figure 4.5, the analysis of the interviews places the figured world of the "curator as exhibitor" (L3) in the central position. To either side are layers L1 (architecture) and L2 (governing body) connected by a dashed line, this represents the potential of influence either layer on a curator's representation of the source community. Likewise, the source community is positioned at the bottom. It is connected to the other three layers via a dashed gray line, as the influence on each other is unknown at this point.

The analysis took shape in breaking down each transcript per research question to discover similarities and differences, and what was missing and still needed to be answered. Small phrases or words were placed in the margins; quotes that could be used in the case studies were highlighted and written out in a notebook for further comparisons. This revealed distinct differences between each curator's "figured world," including to some degree, the two curators from the same museum. Intonations often suggested more than just the word itself, and several times threw up a red flag to check other sources for comparison.

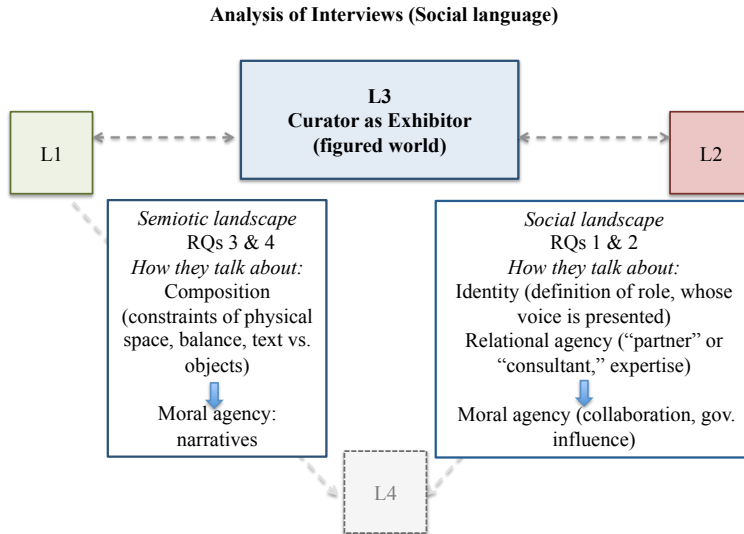


Figure 4.5 Analysis of Interviews as part of a social language in a specific context.

For example, reading one of the transcripts, I found a different intonation in the voice of each curator on the topic of government influence, which suggested a difference of opinion on the affect it had on exhibitions. I played back the tape several times and reread the transcription to verify what I thought I heard. Afterward, I checked reports on the museum to see if what I thought had political connotations did. Red flags pointed to terms used to describe a curator's identity (how he or she saw and/or defined his or her role), moral agency (terms related to narratives, partnership, social responsibility) and relational agency (partnership, consulting, expertise) with the other layers.

The transcripts were viewed as the 'big picture' or the curator's 'mini biography' of a given place and time (Schutt, 2012, p. 339). Richardson (1995) comments, such narratives provide the "goals and intentions of human actors" (in Schutt, 2012, p. 339) where the author (curator) represents him or her-self within the parameters of what is expected. In analyzing the transcripts this way, two things were accomplished: first, I noted that the curators were to some extent role-playing within the context of being a 'curator' and as a representative of the museum; second, each transcript was a narrative of a given moment of time. The information from the transcripts was placed within the realm of each participant, which may differ from the voice of other curators at the same museum(s).



#### 4.5.2 ANALYSIS OF IMAGES: PHOTOGRAPHS (L1, L3)

The compositional components of social semiotics along with linking were used to analyze the photographs and decipher any subtleties in the exhibition space or exhibits not noticed while on the premise of the museum. Images were used to facilitate analysis of the building's architecture, landscape, and general layout (L1) and the placement and content of exhibits (L3). The photographs provided different information at various times during the research.

Images provided a method for *mapping* some of the exhibits. Mapping provided a way to visualize the way an entire exhibition area was organized (i.e., Article 1 on the Toy Museums provides an example), and linking of narratives between each exhibit.

The photographs were used alongside the transcribed interviews for a cross-comparative analysis of the exhibition or exhibit; in this way, they provided a visual form of verification (Pink, 2001). As the research evolved, aspects of the images revealed themselves in different ways, and provided more information or substantiated previously formed opinions.

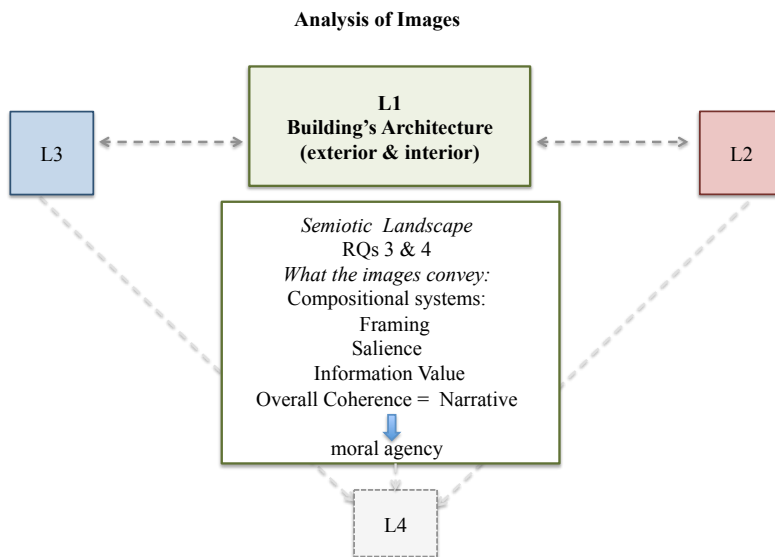


Figure 4.6 Analysis of Image as part of a semiotic landscape.

Figure 4.6 the analysis of the photographs places focus on the semiotic landscape of the building, the exhibition space, and the individual exhibits (L1). Compositional

systems of semiotic landscape organized what and how information was interpreted from the photographs. To either side are layers L2 (governing body) and L3 (curator as exhibitor) connected by a dashed line that represents potential influence on curator's representation of the source community. The source community positioned at the bottom is connected to the other three layers via dashed lines, as it is unknown at this point how each layer influences the other.

I used the following three systems of composition to analyze the photographs of the exhibition space and individual exhibits (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996):

*Informational value:* uses the binary systems of Up/Down, Foreground/Background, Center/Margin to understand how are narratives linked to one another within an exhibit, the overall exhibition, and the placement of the Indigenous galleries. What objects are placed in power positions? How do different structural elements of the building incorporate these binary systems? What influence do they have on communicating “nation” and on how a curator presents a narrative?

*Salience:* examines how each semiotic resource positioned in a composition combined with such as color, lighting, and technology convey meaning potential. Does a color add or detract from the narrative, does the lighting set a mood or highlight specific elements; are objects/exhibits located close together or spaced apart—how do this affect these different aspects effect the intended narrative(s)?

*Framing:* examines the balance, visual rhythm, and reading path of exhibits and exhibitions in the museum's ‘semiotic landscape.’ It examines the repetition of elements and the relationship of elements in proximity to other elements around them. This includes the relation of the main entrance and the exhibition space has on the “reading pathway,” and how that pathway moves in exhibition space between exhibits.

Figure 4.7 provides an example of how the compositional systems were used to analyze the coherence of the exhibition. The image provides part of the exhibition on girl's toys. The Toy Museum is set within a larger museum complex of buildings from different periods of Danish history. In keeping with this setting, the exhibition at the Toy Museum presents the collection of one collector in historical settings. Most of the toys were from the late 1800s to early 1900s and were not the typical toys Danish children would have played with. Figure 4.7 uses the backdrop of an enlarged illustration of the period to frame the collection and narrative. It provides a view of the role society thought young girls should aspire to: taking care of children and taking care of the home. The large dolls on the high pedestals repeat the framed message of the illustration, providing salience and an example of foregrounding.

The same is true for the large dollhouse on the right of the image. Smaller objects from the collection are placed in lower quadrants providing less value and salience. The way the lighting highlights certain objects and soft muted colors also add to the overall visual rhythm of the exhibition; thus, the composition has a certain coherence.



Figure 4.7 Analysis of an exhibit from the Toy Museum at Den Gamle By, Arhus, DK. Permission granted by Den Gamle By to use image.

The analysis of the three compositional factors provides a certain coherence to analyze how meanings are communicated. The visual design of exhibits/ exhibitions provides insight into how different curatorial approaches can create degrees of abstractness and the relational aspects between one exhibition to the next. The information gained from the images provides the foundation to answer RQs three relating to presentation and audience and RQ four asking if the narratives challenge thinking and promote empowerment of the source community or do continue present a politically safe agenda.

For example, I realized two exhibits (Link-Up and 'I'm Sorry') at NMA located in different sections of the gallery could have produced more impact if they were in closer proximity to one another, as the narratives presented in each were closely related. This realization seemed to provide corroboration with Australia's national political overtones on the topic of saying 'Sorry' to the Aboriginal and Torres

Islands' peoples. I found the images provided a valuable tool to use in conjunction with the various textual documents.

#### **4.5.3 ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION (L2)**

The primary sources of textual documentation consisted of the annual reports, which contained the mission statement and policy (for most museums); the government documents that enacted the museum and newspaper reviews related to the museum's policy, the exhibitions, or practices. By looking into the concept of voice (Wertsch, 1991), the social language (Bakhtin, 1986) was used to analyze the word choices in these documents. If "museums are the products of the society they support" (Janes and Conaty (2005, p.1) the language used in the governing documents and mission should identify who is included in that society. In 1998, Sharon Macdonald conveyed the manners of the "State" are not always discernible. Thus, the contextual layer of the governing body (L2) situated as an "as if" figured world (Holland, et al, 1998) chooses the wording of the mission from their voice and position in the museum. The mission statement implicitly provides a means to gain additional information related to the role of the curator (RQ1) and how the language used in governing documents might influence the curator's relationship with the source community (RQ2).

The mission statements combined with the governing acts that established each national museum provide a tool to analyze the influence of the government on the governing body and how that may effect a curator's representation of the source community. The voice presented by the museum's website provided an extension of the mission statement in how it conveyed its identity to society. Together these sources and the newspaper articles were weighed against the actual comments made by the curators interviewed.

The newspaper articles provide a comparison and counterpoint to the other primary source of documentation. Newspaper articles provided reviews of the exhibitions, comments on organizational change and the museum's architecture. They provided a voice from outside the museum and government, although that does not say that politics did not enter into the words chosen in the articles. In some cases, a curator commented in his or her interview that there was little or no influence from the government or the board, but articles suggested otherwise. This suggested there was a dynamic environment that needed further investigation to balance information; thus, further delving into museum documentation, and other voices outside the museum were sought (different main stream news sources, i.e., national TV stations and leading city newspapers).

The museum as institution (L2) plays the central role within the textual analysis. How the museum identifies itself and who is part of that identity was indicated in the organization of the governing body and its relation to other practices within it. If the governing documents specified a demographic make-up of the board, which

incorporated members of the source communities, it would suggest the community might be more involved in a variety of roles in the museum (i.e., terms of “bicultural policy,” “museum different”).

These terms also suggest the degree the building’s architecture embodies values shared by all sectors of society. Often architectural choices are mandated in the governing documents (i.e., where it will be situated, who is involved in the design, and to what degree it conveys “nation,” and the location of Indigenous peoples galleries). The mission statement was analyzed to see which segments of society were included or if it provided a voice of more general non-inclusive terminology. Did the governing document and the mission statement provide the same voice or did they differ? Many of the word choices mentioned above pertain to the museum’s identity, moral agency, and its potential relational agency with the source communities.

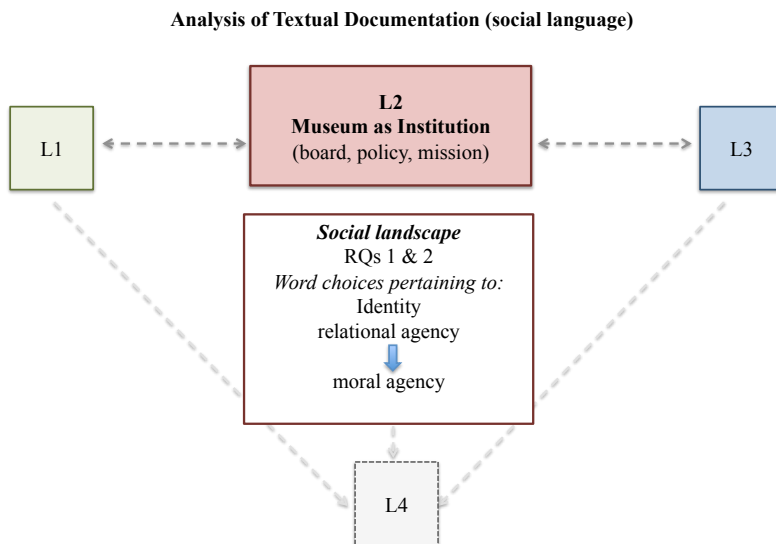


Figure 4.8 Analysis of Textual Documentation as part of the social landscape.

Figure 4.8 visually depicts the potential influence the governing documents, policy, and mission have to the other contextual layers L1 to L4. Having the various forms of data; the transcripts, textual documentation, and photographs provided for triangulation of data across different timeframes, sources, and places (Denzin, 2012). Triangulation allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon

in question: what influences the curators meaning making process. While Flick (2007) states triangulation is neither a tool nor a form of validation, I suggest it does offer a means of checking reliability between various forms of data.

#### 4.5.4 LINKING DATA: THE ROLE OF THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4)

During various stages of analysis, data were examined to find commonalities and distinctions that would indicate what step(s) needed to be taken next. It became a process of listening to the various 'voices', and placing them in a hierarchy respective to the aim of this thesis' and reassembling the data accordingly.

The use of the “context layers” (L1-L4) and “figured worlds” (L2 and L3) provided a framework to segment the ‘voices’ that influence a curator’s representation of the source community. By segmenting the governing body (L2) and the curator (L3) as two different figured worlds situated in the museum and analyzing the coherence of the composition of the semiotic landscape (L1 and L3) provided individual analysis of each museum that organized a cross-comparative analysis of the cases. The outcome along with ethical considerations (Section 4.5) established the fourth contextual layer, the source community (L4).

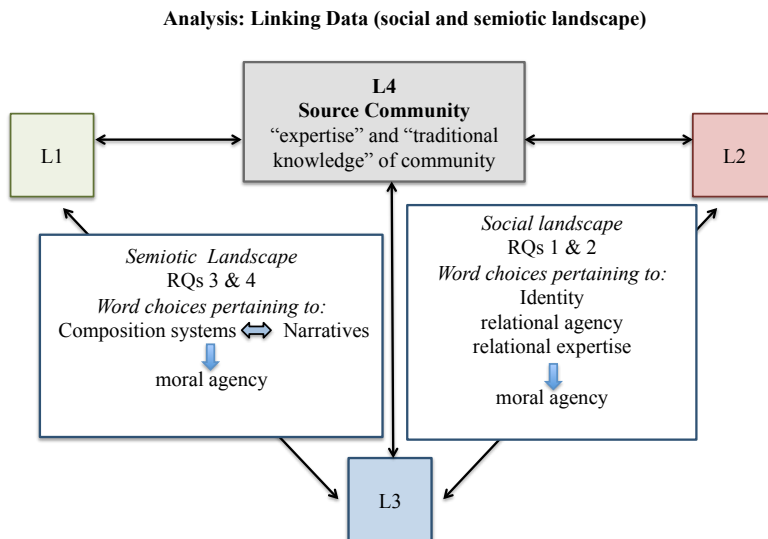


Figure 4.9 Analysis of linked data (social and semiotic landscape) and the development of the source community as a fourth layer of context (L4).

If the analysis of the social language used in the interview correlated to the mission and policy, chances are it would be reflected in how the source community was represented in the design and narrative of the exhibition. It would also suggest whose voice prevailed in the exhibition. Figure 4.9 illustrates how linking the data provided the degree of voice the source community was involved self-representation and co-curating. The more the social language used by the governing body in the policy (L2) suggests inclusiveness, the more it seems likely the curators (L3) be co-curators with the source community (L4) as either a consultant or a partner. The dual directional arrows suggest the relational aspects between each layer. Thus, the semiotic landscape of the building's architecture and physical landscape (L1 and L3) provides insight in to the relational aspects with the L2 and L3 layers, and whether members of the source community is part of the design process. However, the lines could also be drawn as unidirectional, which may suggest boundaries exist between the two layers. Consequently, how the lines are drawn has the potential to define the identity of each layer individually and collectively as *the* social voice of a museum. It was only through the analysis of the images, interviews, and textual documentation that the voice of the source community emerged.

## 4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Denzin (2009) refers to a call for qualitative researchers to realize that their community is not a single entity and because of this, guidelines and criteria should be fitted to specific paradigms and genres. He places this in alignment with Indigenous research ethics. It is too easy as a researcher to be "blinded by our own perspective: truth is always partial" (Denzin, 2009, p. 153). An ambition with this research was to provide as balanced a voice as possible. After visiting several museums and interviewing their curator(s), I kept returning to the differences between each museum's exhibiting methodologies and the extent each worked with the source communities. Not being a curator, nor an Indigenous person led me to ask myself, "How do I try to understand these differences; is there research that can help me to be more objective in my findings"?

I found an answer in the scholarly work of Indigenous researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith who is a Māori academic. She described the "intersecting challenges between Western and Indigenous methodologies, ethics, institutions, and communities" and "the possibilities that can be achieved" through such challenges (Smith, 2005, p. 86). Indigenous researchers developed Indigenous methodology out of a need to represent and define themselves, their culture, and their history as a means of empowering and providing an alternative message (Kovach, 2009; Grieves, 2009; L.T. Smith 2005, 2012; Lonetree, 2012; Walter and Andersen, 2013). Paul Chaat

Smith (2005) refers to a similar statement by Native American researcher Edward Said that described Western research as, "a corporate institution that has made statements about Indigenous peoples, authorizing views of us, describing (us), teaching about (us), and ruling over (us)" (p.88.). The overriding thought suggests research by non-Indigenous researchers has placed Indigenous peoples under the microscope of colonialism and western ideology.

I chose to avoid doing the same and realized the challenge in doing so. Denzin (2009) advocates researchers use the term "Indigenous performance" to provide a "means of political representation, a form of resistance and critique, and a way to address issues of equity, healing, and social justice" (p. 297). While I do not agree with Denzin's choice of "performance" as a term, he does capture the need for non-Indigenous researchers to consider how to approach such research. The analysis of the various voices represented within the exhibition's composition, the terminology used in museum policies, mission statements, and the curator's interviews, provided insight into how Western ideology was incorporated and the extent that Indigenous curation was welcomed.

According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005), Western approaches ignore the multiple traditions of knowledge systems in the distinctive value and behaviors of Indigenous peoples. The individual case studies and analysis attempt to reflect this knowledge as I sought to understand Indigenous concerns and concepts (as listed below) and place them in the appropriate context, which was not necessarily my own. It was a great learning experience. She, suggests, at its most basic level research ethics center on "establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships not just with individuals, but also with people as individuals, as collectives, and as members of communities, and with humans who live in and with other entities in the environment" (Smith, 2005, p. 97). This led to several considerations for this research:

- Establishing rapport with the curator during the interview;
- To be respectful of the curators time;
- To provide anonymity of the curator if requested (each curator was asked to choose whether he or she wanted anonymity or not);
- To provide transcripts in PDF format for review & verification of information within;
- To provide any proposed articles related to specific museum for review by curator before sending to a journal;
- To gain consent for permission to publish images taken at the museum; and
- To provide a final copy of this research to each curator involved, the various Māori iwis who granted permission to use images, and for each director of the museum's media archive.



Gaile S. Cannella and Yvonne S. Lincoln (2011) suggest using an, "ethical perspective that would always address human suffering and life conditions, align with the politics of the oppressed and moves to reclaim multiple knowledges and ways of being" involves "complexity, openness to uncertainty, fluidity, and continued reflexive insight" (p. 82). Cannella and Lincoln refer to Richie and Rau's (2010) support of critical research ethics that counter colonialism, and in doing so value and recognize the need to (p. 83):

- Expose the diversity of realities: The theoretical concept of *figured worlds* and *narratives* provided such insight, and differences in the composition of each museum's semiotic landscape,
- Engage with the webs of interaction that construct problems in ways that lead to power/ privilege for particular groups: The "as if" figured worlds (L2-4) provide a means to analyze identity and positions of power through relational expertise and how cultural artifacts are used as tools of mediation,
- Reposition problems and decisions towards social justice: both theories were used for analysis. Semiotic landscape pointed out spatial and compositional weaknesses, while CHAT pointed to concerns in the social landscape regarding inclusiveness;
- Join in solidarity with the traditionally oppressed to create new ways of functioning: Indigenous perspectives informed my understanding and moved me to a position, where situated in my own culture I was able to have a better understanding of an Indigenous one. Including Indigenous methodology provided the ability for me to see cultural understanding as an ongoing process where our interpretation is how a person is culturally and historically situated, in what Gadamer referred to as historical consciousness (Gadamer, 1975).

The last point was not so much as 'joining in solidarity' as creating new ways of questioning how exhibits represent marginalize peoples. If I had joined 'in solidarity,' I believe I would have been placed too far to one side and lose any objectiveness of the overall aim. However, during the interviews, I understood any interaction with the participants partially co-constructed the data collected. A few times, I engaged in a more conversational approach and mistakenly offered a personal opinion by either agreeing with the curator or pointing out an advantage when he or she saw a shortcoming of the exhibit. I did this in an attempt to gain information at a deeper level; however, it is difficult to know how this changed the outcome of the 'interview.'

## 4.6 SUMMARY

Using qualitative empirical methods, multiple case studies were used to understand the multi-voices that influence a curator's representation of the nations Indigenous people. The framework for the data collected was formulated from the research questions and aim. Focus was placed on semi-structured interviews, photographs of each museum's exhibitions and architecture, and various forms of textual documentation. Collectively the data provided triangulation. Four context layers (L1-L4) focused on areas of potential influences on a curator's representation of the source community. During the analysis of the data developed into three themes to compare the similarities and differences across the cases. In the end, the themes revealed one main theme.

Robert K. Yin's (2011) five-phased cycle was used for the iterative and interpretive means of analysis:

1. Studying the meanings of people's lives under real world conditions;
2. Representing the views and perspectives of participants in the study;
3. Covering contextual conditions within which people work;
4. Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior; and
5. Striving to use multiple sources of evidence instead of relying on a single source (pp. 7-8).

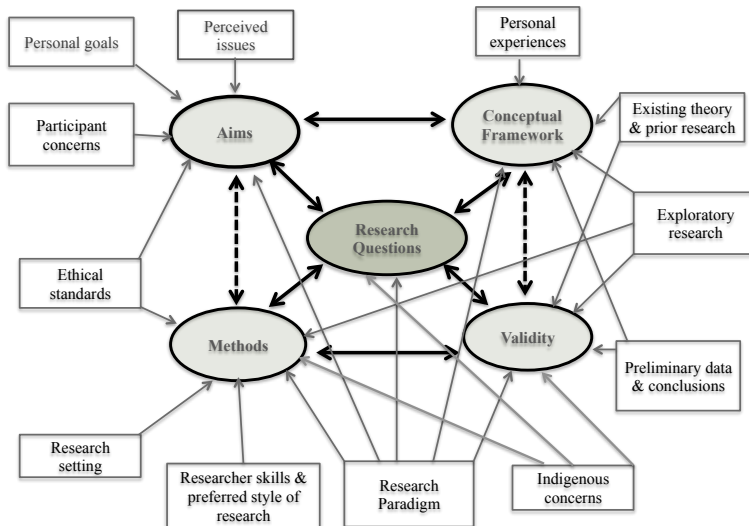


Figure 4.10 Influences in the Research Design (adapted from Maxwell, 2004,p.6).

Figure 4.5 visually summarizes the chapter. The two triangles represent the research design as a whole. In the *conceptual* first step (the upper triangle), it was important to align the aims, the conceptual framework and the research questions. Likewise, during the procedural *operational* second step (the lower triangle), the theory, methods, and validity needed to be compatible and aligned to the research questions. Indigenous methods influenced the theory, methodology, and validity. Influences from Indigenous methodology or ‘other ways of knowing’ provided a better understanding of how to ‘read’ specific museum exhibits and to hear if the ‘voice’ of an Indigenous curator was present.

In the theoretical chapter, I used four general “context layers” (L1-L4) to present the two theories. During the analysis of the data collection, the four layers dissolved into three themes: influence of governing documents, differences in curatorial approaches, and interaction with source communities. Central to these themes was the aim of the research, the four research questions, and ethical considerations concerning Indigenous peoples, which are presented in the case studies in Chapter Five. The narrowing from layers to themes provided a more concentrated focus on the findings presented in a cross-comparative discussion in Chapter Seven. A final theme: of “Blended voices” emerged from the Discussion and is presented in the final chapter.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Shikamo, K. (2001) ‘Exile and deliverance’ in M.S. Winberg, *My Elands Heart: A Collection of Stories and Art* !Xun and Khwe San Art and Culture Project. Claremont, ZA: David Phillip Publishers Ltd. Pp. 118-125. The book contains the history, traditions, experiences and thoughts of the !Xun and Khwe, groups within San family of South Africa. It provides the message that after all that has happened to their culture they were able to survive and the assure their culture has stayed relatively the same despite all the political changes.
2. After receiving the follow-up questions from the curator at SAM, I also contacted Dr. Jeanette Deacon, a well-known rock art researcher and one of the original ‘curators’ of the rock art exhibit there. Her experience of developing the exhibit provided valuable information for the third article and understanding the some of the complexities that arise from working with source communities. I had met Dr. Deacon some years ago in relation to previous research on rock art. I am extremely grateful for her time then and now.
3. Additionally, an interview was carried out at the Origins Centre, Johannesburg, ZA with the curator in charge. The museum, suggested by Thabo Mbeki after a visiting the rock art located in the Drakensburg Mountains, provides an overview of the history of humankind and humanity in southern Africa and the destruction of Southern Africa’s—and the world’s—continuous forms of art at the hands of colonists before its was rediscovered. It provides insight into the San way of knowing. A new exhibition focuses on the effects of climate change in southern Africa. For more information on the museum see: <http://www.origins.org.za>
4. The literature of Māori author Witi Ihimaera (Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki) (cf. *The Parihaka Woman*, 2012; Pounamu Pounamu, 1972/2012); Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe) (*The Antelope*

*Woman* 2011); Sherman J. Alexie (Spokane and Coeur d'Alene) (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, 1993; *Reservation Blues*, 1996).

## CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDIES

*A nation's culture resides in the hearts and the souls of its people. -  
Mahatma Gandhi<sup>1</sup>*

In *Museums, Society Inequality*, Richard Sandell (2002) conveys apprehension for what he sees as the social roles and responsibilities of museums in “ameliorating” the symptoms of social injustice (p. xvii). The museums in this study are in nations where colonial rule nearly eradicated the life, language, and cultural ways of its Indigenous people: a plight that continues to this day to some degree. Related to Sandell’s concerns, a foundation for learning in a national museum is established in how it represents the cultural identities of its peoples (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). In this thesis, the *learners* include the curators, museum management, and the members of the source communities: a group of people rarely considered within learning in museum research.

The data collected for each case was foremost comprised of semi-structured interviews with curators’ along with the entire data collected for the case. Additional documentation and empirical research was used to fill in any information gaps. The culmination of this information created the breadth of findings needed to understand the complexity of the curator’s role related to the aim of the thesis. The case studies are: Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Washington, D.C., USA; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand (Te Papa); and National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra, Australia. Each museum curators I interviewed chose how he or she wanted to be referred to. Several use their actual name, three chose to be entirely anonymous, and one provided an alternative name. Each case (5.1 to 5.3), will be presented in the four layers developed in Chapter Three, and the salient themes that developed are presented in the case summary at the end of each section:

**L1) *Architecture & Design***; the overall semiotic landscape of the building’s design through the designers voice;

**L2) *The Museum as an Institution*** presents political and management influence of the social language of the mission statements devised by the museum’s governing body;

**L3) *Curator as Exhibitor*** uses the social language used in the curators interviews to discuss the composition of semiotic landscape as means to understand the how, why, and what of the narratives presented; and whether any influences from L1 and L2 affect what and how the present an exhibition.

**L4) *Source Community*** from the social language in the curator’s interviews and the mission statement, focus is placed on whose voice is being represented and how source community members are involved in their own representation.

## 5.1 THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, (NMAI), WASHINGTON D.C., U.S.A.

*An indigenous museum must engage itself with more than ethnography and markets: it must include the voices and identities of Native peoples and communities.*

*– Duane Champagne (Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa)<sup>1</sup>*

For thousands of years Indigenous peoples made their home in the Western Hemisphere from the northern Arctic reaches of Canada to the tip of Tierra del Fuego in Chile. Charles Mann (2011) asserts that as many as five waves of settlement took place before Columbus reached the shores in 1492. Mann notes, the actual arrival of ‘Indians’ is inconsequential, and he suggests focus should be placed on the vast achievements and wealth various Native peoples accrued. The consequence of Europeans conquering the New World equally affected Indigenous peoples from North, Central, and South America. Subsequently, all Native peoples experienced being removed from and losing their land, and exposed to contagious disease and its ensuing death. European conquerors also stole gold and other minerals, and denied Native Americans the right to speak their native language, and to practice spiritual and cultural traditions that became all but lost (McMaster and Trafzer, 2008; Mann, 2011). As quickly as Treaties were made they were broken. It is a past that some would label as ‘genocide’ (Lonetree, 2006a, 2006b; Atalay, 2006).

A vital part of the Native American culture is the generational passing down of ancient philosophies (McMaster and Trafzer, 2008). Culture is reflected in songs, stories, dance, ceremonies and religions. The ancient belief systems live on in many contemporary Indigenous peoples who honor these traditions while living in the modern world (McMaster and Trafzer, 2008). Native beliefs linked through storytelling provide a sacred manner of knowing with the use of “ceremony to bless and balance their relationship with the world around them and the invisible realm of spirits” (Mohawk, 2008, p. 57). McMaster and Trafzer (2008) state, based on oral traditions:

*... knowledge is known in circular versus linear time: contemporary events and past experiences form a great circle that greatly influences our present lives. The circular manner of perceiving past and present, rather than seeing one event simply follow another, is most important as a way to think about Native History, (p. 116).*

The concept of time for Native Americans is placed in a different context than in the Western world where it is more about looking to the future—not the past. This is an important consideration when considering how Native American's are represented in museum exhibits, and a point discussed further in this chapter.

In the beginning of the book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*, author Charles Mann (2011) refers to a description of history found in his high school history book. It told the story of a Native American, named Squanto who taught the Pilgrims how to plant maize and fertilize the rocky soil of the New England coastline using fish as fertilizer; however, Capt. Miles Standish taught the Pilgrims' to defend themselves against the unfriendly Indians. While this vignette is not false, it also does not tell the actual history. Mann (2011) reminds the reader that if it were not for the various New England tribes (Narragansett, Massasoit, and Wampanoag) the survival of the Pilgrims would have been at stake and chances are they would have died off soon after arrival in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The importance of recalling history and how it is recorded in a textbook runs in parallel with narratives presented in museum exhibits that provide only a portion of the actual history—often glossing over more political or difficult aspects. As someone who attended high school in the early 1970s, I can fully relate to the experience that Mann recalls: U.S. history was taught from a Western point of view—much like the portrayal of Native Americans in Hollywood movies or on TV.

A glimpse into Mann's high school history book and its connection to what is portrayed on the big and little screen fits neatly into the title of Paul Chaat Smith's (Comanche) book *Everything You Know about Indians is Wrong* (2009).<sup>2</sup> The book examines the role of American Indians in the United States and the effect media has had on it. Smith (2009) writes, "And battles over historical revisionism seem doomed from the start, because the last thing these images are about is what really happened. They're fables being told to shape the future" (p. 6). The establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) became a critical opportunity for a retelling of the Americas history and this time through the voice of Native Americans that could now dispel the myth that "Native peoples do not exist any more" (Champagne, 2011, p. 75).

The NMAI lies at eastern end of the National Mall in Washington D.C. It holds a place of prestige as the closest of the Smithsonian Institute's museums to the United States Capitol building. The museum (D.C.) opened in 2005 based on the large collection of George Gustav Heye. A second location, in New York City is where Heye established the original museum in the 1800s. The vast collection evolved from his travels throughout North, Central, and South America; therefore, the museum is representative of *all* Native Americans in the Western Hemisphere from Northern Canada to Tierra del Fuego in southern most Chile (NMAI website). The representation of all Native Americans has had "a lot of push-back" by U.S.

Indians, according to associate curator Paul Chaat Smith (in interview, August, 2013).

This case study centers on a semi-structured interview (August 2013) and follow-up questionnaire (March, 2015) with Associate curator, Paul Chaat Smith along with document analysis (Mission statements, government documents, newspaper articles) and related research. Additional information from various writings of Smith, along with transcripts of interviews and public speaking events with him, and an article written by Jolene Rickard (2007) one of the other curators of the exhibition were included as part of the collected data. The sources used within this section were intentionally chosen to provide a native voice. For example, in the following section on the design of the building and its landscape I have used comments from those who were involved with the process—thus, I consider their voice to be part of the primary data collection.

Indigenous peoples are not homogenous; therefore, out of respect, I have added the tribal affiliation after an author is first mentioned as much as possible as it distinguishes their identity from having ‘Native Americans’, or ‘First Nations’ affiliation(s).

### **5.1.1 THE ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN (L1)**

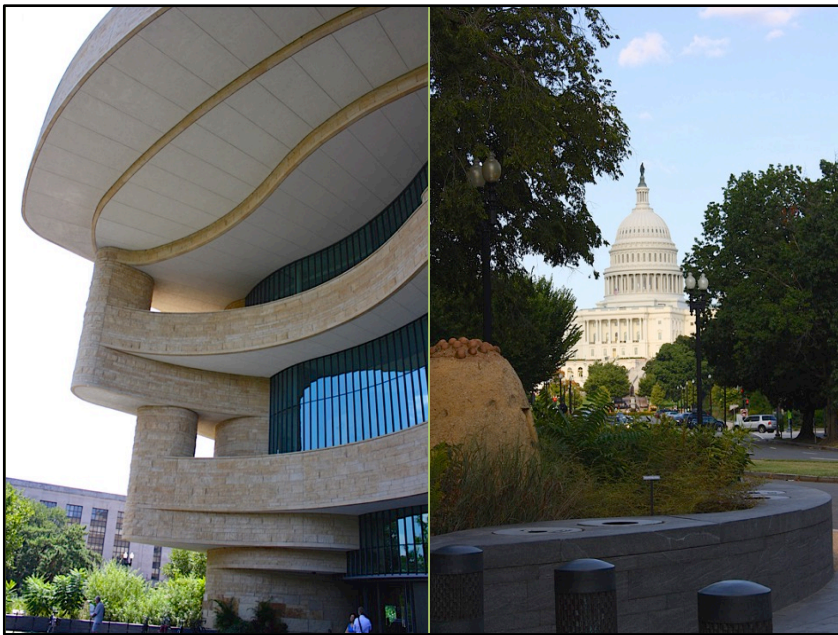
From the museum’s outset in 1989, it was important to the first Director of the museum, W. Richard West (Cheyenne, Arapahoe) that *all* aspects of the museum needed to reflect the views of the Native Americans (West and Cobb, 2005). The placement of the museum reclaims Native land once belonging to the Piscataway, Powhatan and Nanticoke (Tayac, 2012). Thus, the symbolism of its location is not lost on Native Americans. To some degree due to the building’s presence, nation building occurs and suggests the United States has established a more progressive relationship with Native Americans, specifically those from the U.S (Brady, 2011).

#### **5.1.1.1 The Lady in Native Regalia**

Museums can be painful sites for Native peoples as they are tied to the colonization process (Lonetree, 2012, p.1). NMAI’s decision to have collaborative partnerships with native communities provided a shift from the museum as temple to one of forum (Lonetree, 2012). The museum seeks to address and reach beyond “misconceptions and illuminate how Native Americans perceive their place” (Gordon, Harris and Pickwith, 2012, p. 17). Thus, Native sensibilities are reflected throughout both the exterior and interior architecture of the building from the east facing entrance with sun symbols etched into the doors to the domed roof that “opens to the sky” and provides light into the interior atrium (Spirit, n.d.). The space of the museum immediately creates a distinct environment from the rest of the Smithsonian buildings with their granite and marble facades facing the National



Mall (Fig. 5.1.1). Douglas Cardinal (Blackfoot) along with other Native architects and consultants designed the building ('Architecture and Landscape', NMAI website, 2012). The exterior of the building is cast in Kasota limestone from North Dakota, which provides textured warmth of golden tones on the curvilinear façade. Duane Blue Spruce (Laguna/ Ohkay Owingeh), one of the architects, speaks of the building as a female, and the only museum on the Mall that is considered as such (Spirit, n.d.). The building's curvilinear walls reflect the wind swept canyons created by the power of water and wind and reflect the importance of the natural world as spiritual places (Gordon, Harris, and Pickworth, 2012). Upon seeing the museum I was mentally transferred from the stoic marble facades of the other Smithsonian buildings to the Canyonlands of the four corners region of the United States (Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico), sans the lush vegetation and water features surrounding the building. Thus, "the architectural design establishes the building as part of the landscape" (Cobb, 2005a, p. 491) and sets itself apart from others on the Mall.



*Figure 5.1.1. The entrance of the NMAI, and its proximity to the U.S. Capitol Images used with the permission of NMAI, photos 2013.*

The landscape reflects the importance of Indigenous peoples connection to the land (Spirit, n.d.). The planting of 33,000 plants recalls how vegetation would have appeared in the area pre-European contact; consequently, the landscape continues the theme of returning to a Native place (Gordon, Harris, and Pickworth, 2012).

Four habitats were incorporated; forest, wetlands, meadow, and traditional croplands (with the “three sisters”: corn, squash, and beans). Forty large boulders known as Grandfather Rocks, are the elders of the landscape welcoming visitors and providing a reminder of the longevity of Native people and their ancestral past (‘Architecture’, NMAI website, 2015). The boulders, from Quebec, Canada were blessed before their journey, placed in the same direction as they were, and then blessed again; the process show respect for the rocks so they would not be disoriented in the new location (Fig. 5.1.2). Cardinal markers placed along the north-south, east-west axes provide another significant part of the landscape. Their axis intersects with the center of the interior of the building at what is known as the Potomac atrium or ‘meeting place’ (Gordon, Harris and Pickworth, 2012). Each marker was brought to the museum’s location by a different source community: Hawai’i; Northwest Territories, Canada; Great Falls, Maryland; and Punta Arenas, Chile. Native Americans consider rocks as living beings that deserve respect. For Native Americans everything is interconnected (Spirit, n.d.). During my visit in during some intensely warm and humid days in August the landscape provided a peaceful shaded respite from the hustle and bustle of D.C. that was shared with various species of waterfowl.



*Figure 5.1.2 Grandfather Rocks and wetlands. Images used with the permission of NMAI, Smithsonian Institute, photos 2013.*

Water is a dominant part of the exterior narrative and is presented in a Cascading waterfall, stream, and pond. According to Donna House (Oneida) one of the museum’s landscape designers, water plays a role in Native stories and is reflected

in the “different voices of water” that stream along the building and provide a way of shedding the rest of the national Mall experience (Spirit, n.d.). The stream running along the north side of the building represents a tributary of the Potomac that once ran through the property. The large waterfall was closed at the time of my visit, but there was still running water that could be heard; thus, instead of hearing just the rush of the falls the nuance of a mere trickling of water could be heard along with the rustling of leaves in the surrounding landscape. The water is an important element to the structure of the building; The distinct shape of the Canyonlands, were carved out by wind and water and provide added significance to the relation of the building to its surroundings. Other native elements include stonework at the main entrance symbolizing the alignment of the planets on November 28, 1989 when federal legislation was introduced to develop the museum (Gordon, Harris and Pickworth, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

### 5.1.1.2 Constructing National Identities

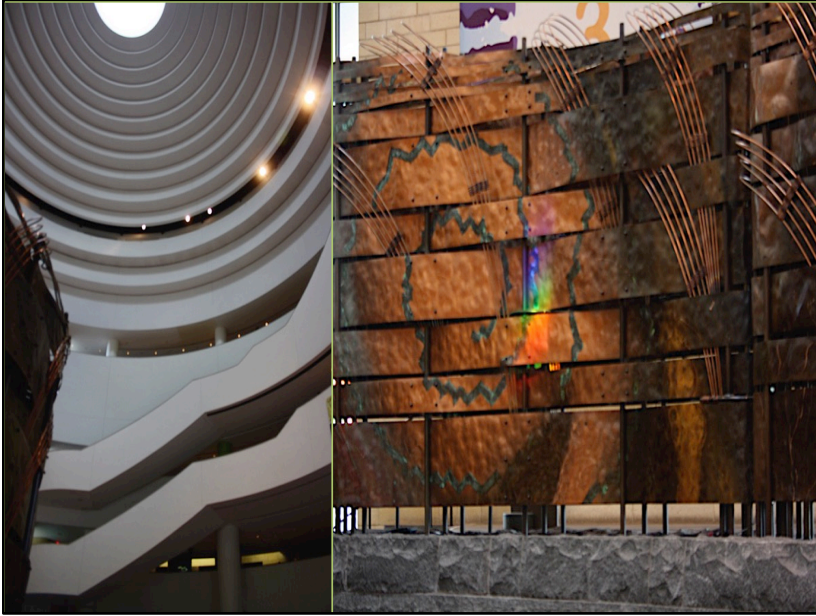
For years before Europeans contact, Native peoples made and kept peace treaties with one another (Deloria, 2008). When treaties were initiated between Europeans and Native people, there were two different viewpoints of what was taking place. Native people held the belief that the land belong to the community not an individual and did not understand the Europeans concept of “purchase” (Deloria, 2008, p. 144). Tribal elders believed they had merely given Europeans permission to use the land—not take it for their own (Deloria, 2008). Thus, the Governing Act that created the museum and the physical location where the museum was built created a momentous taking back of Native land.

NMAI redefined the idea of a museum as a space with its prominent location on the National Mall it symbolically reclaimed the District of Columbia as Indian Country (Cobb, 2005a, p.490). In combination with the landscaped grounds, the building provides a “conceptual link between the natural and built environments”: an idea that is “central to Native worldviews” (Cobb, 2005a, p. 490). NMAI curator in a 2005 conference presentation, Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) views the museum’s location on the National Mall as (Smith, 2005):

*A profound act that showed the American government and its people that Indians wanted to be a part of the national conversation, to finally talk, seriously, and at the highest levels, about things we never really talked about before. . . .it is time, at last we speak about the hard things, the powerful things, the unspeakable things (p.2).*

Moreover, Native Americans *wanted* to be part of it. On the opening day, a procession of 25,000 Native people from all over the Western hemisphere moved down the National Mall to the museum (Hoxie, 2011). In figure 5.1.1 the U.S.

Capitol is seen in the background from the south side of the museum; however, earlier images of the museum provided a similar view from the entrance where the Capitol is in full view. The vegetation is now too tall and lush to see it except in the winter.



*Figure 5.1.3 The Interior Space: The atrium (L), and the woven wall of the greeting place (R). Images used with permission of NMAI, photo 2013.*

### 5.1.1.3 The Interior Space

The Potomac Atrium dominates the museum's interior as it soars some 120 feet to the dome overhead (Martin, 2012). Entering the space, it feels a bit overwhelming in its sheer volume, but once inside and moving through the various levels its significance begins to unfold. The Potomac area serves as a public space and a gathering space that can be viewed from the balconies of each level. During consultation with Native communities it became clear to the designers that such a space was needed and that it would need to incorporate "the organization of the Native world" (Martin, 2012. p. 32). The entrance faces east, an oculus in the dome provides a view of the sky, and the circle in the floor of the rotunda reflects the four cardinal direction markers. The axis of the solstice and equinox are signified using rings of red and black granite on the floor. Potomac is an Iroquoian, Delaware, and Powhatan word that means, "where the goods are brought in" and is also the name

of one of two rivers that serve as connection points in Washington D. C (Gordon, Harris and Pickworth, 2012, p. 32).

High up on the south wall eight large prisms reflect the sun at certain times of the day. A wall of woven copper provides a semi-circular seating area or gathering space separating the area from the entry (Fig 5.1.3.); the prism cast the spectrum, seen in the image. The texture of the wall imitates Native basketry weaving traditions (Martin, 2012). On the North side of the building large windows look out at the stream and landscape bringing nature inside, which places emphases the museum as ‘Native place.’

The curvilinear walls continue on the inside while enveloping a four-story staircase to the various galleries. The suggested movement through the exhibition area is to start at the top with an introductory short film in the Lelawi Theater before moving into the various galleries. As mentioned each level overlooks the atrium area; therefore, any performance in the Potomac meeting place can be heard and viewed designating the balconies a functional part of the overall space. A musical performance by one man was given while I was there, and he could be heard from clearly from the uppermost level. In addition to the Potomac meeting place the entrance level contains an award winning native food café, an espresso bar, and a theatre for public lectures, film, and other cultural activities. Galleries are on the other three levels, with an activity center on the third level and conference area on the fourth level.

### **5.1.2 GOVERNING BODY AND DOCUMENTS (L2)**

The Museum was established by an Act of Congress in 1989, and was founded on the collection of the former Museum of the American Indian / Heye Foundation in New York City. The collection is comprised of more than 800,000 works of significance, including art, cultural, historical, and spiritual objects (History, NMAI website, 2015). Georg Gustav Heye (1874-1957) was born into a wealthy New York family, graduated from Columbia University in 1896, and established a investment-banking firm in 1901. While working as an electrical engineer, he travelled to Arizona, lived in a tent near an Indian community and acquired a deerskin shirt; the first piece of what would be the foundation of his collection of Native American items (Small, 2000). His various purchases were from tribes, villages and dealers he met in his travels, which extended to Central and South America. In 1916 he established the Museum of the American Indian in New York City, and in 1990 part of that collection was seen in the newly opened National Museum of the American Indian’s George Gustav Heye Center housed at the U.S. Custom House in Manhattan (Small, 2000). The museum would not exist without Heye’s vast ‘hobby’ of collecting, which Smith in the interview, commented that based on this the museum, “is about desposition like it or not” (August, 2013).

NMAI has three locations: two museum locations (New York City and Washington, D.C.), and offices and a collection center in nearby Suitland, Maryland.

On NMAI's opening day, more than 500 hundred Indigenous Nations gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. It was the largest gathering of Native peoples in modern history to celebrate and honor their own survivance (Cobb, 2005b). At the opening ceremony, Director W. Richard West (Southern Cheyenne) spoke the following words to Native people and non-Indigenous alike (Cobb, 2005b):

*We have lived in these lands and sacred places for thousands of years. We thus are the original part of the cultural heritage of every person hearing these words today, whether you are Native or non-Native. We have felt the cruel and destructive edge of the colonialism that followed contact and lasted for hundreds of years. But in our minds and in history, we are not its victims. As the Mohawks have counseled us, "It is hard to see the future with tears in your eyes"(p.361).*

Much controversy has stemmed over NMAI's choice not to overtly focus on the effects of colonialism but to focus more on what happen through the notion of survivance. Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) first used the term and defines it as, "stories of survivance are an active presence . . . survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry"(1998, p.15). The concept is one also embraced by then Director W. Richard West who saw the museum as being more about "cultural survivance" or the fact that Native peoples "are still here" (West and Cobb, 2005).

### **5.1.2.1 Public Law 101-185 November 28, 1989**

The National Museum of the American Indian Act is known as Public Law 101-185, and was enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in 1989. Much of the credit for the Act was given to Senators Daniel K. Inouye (Native Hawaiian) and Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne) from Colorado, the latter authored Bill HR 2668, which developed into Public Law 101-185. Congress found that there was "no national museum devoted exclusively to the history and art of cultures Indigenous to the Americas" (Sec.2.1). According to Section 3, the addition of "a living memorial to Native Americans and their traditions, which shall be known as the 'National Museum of the American Indian.'" The intended purposes for the museum was listed as (Public Law, Sec.3. b. 20 USC 80q-1.):

- (1) Advance the study of Native Americans, including the study of language, literature, history, art, anthropology, and scientific interest,



- (2) Collect, preserve, and exhibit Native American objects of artistic, historical, literary, anthropological, and scientific interest;
- (3) Provide for Native American Research and study programs; and
- (4) Provide for the means of carrying out paragraphs, (1), (2), and (3) in the District of Columbia, The State of New York, and other appropriate locations.

The Act specifies under a special rule that at least 12 of the 23 members appointed to the Board of Trustees must be “Indians” (Sec.5f.2 103 STAT.1339). Furthermore, Sec.16 (10) defines the term “Native American” as an “individual of a tribe, people, or culture that is Indigenous to the Americas and includes such terms as Native Hawaiian”, which “refers to a member of the aboriginal people who, before 1778 occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area that now comprises of the State of Hawaii” (Sec. 16.11).

#### **5.1.2.2 A Word from the Directors**

Smithsonian Secretary Robert McCormick Adams coined the term “Museum Different” when he announced the birth of the museum.<sup>4</sup> W. Richard West was appointed NMAI’s first Director in 1990. In an interview with Amanda Cobb (Chickasaw) in 2005, West commented that one of the things he felt was important for the museum was the notion of living cultures and having a native voice:

*. . . There are hundreds of Native communities in this hemisphere right now; there are thirty to forty million people who are Indigenous in this hemisphere. This museum has to be about them too, not just our ancestors or ancient cultural patrimony as important as that is. . . . Another value would be that I really felt the Native communities in this hemisphere were quite capable of bringing to bear . . . their own views, voices, set of eyes. . . . respect for contemporary scholarship that Native peoples themselves have authentic and authoritative voices to bring to their own representation. (p. 518).*

West was aware that museums “present a foreign notion to Native peoples” (West and Cobb, 2005, p. 519). Instead of objectifying cultural artifacts as archaeological finds his goal was to make them as realistic as possible by connecting them with Native communities who created the material- “so it almost becomes a Native place in Washington” (West and Cobb, 2005, p. 519). However, at the time West was Director, 20-25 % of the staff in Washington were Native people were from North America “creating challenges” for working with Native peoples from South and Central America (West and Cobb, 2005, p. 522). Yet, he believed the museum to be more than just a museum; it was a “civic space,” a “meeting ground” where the

various cultural groups of the Hemisphere could come together and “set the stage for cultural reconciliation” (p. 520).

Current Director Kevin Gover (Pawnee/ Comanche) has carried on these ideas and beliefs. In the forward to the second edition of *Native Universe*, he posits (McMaster and Trafzer, 2012):

*Native peoples, so long engaged in struggle and survival, have emerged as the authors of our own destiny, . . . At the same time, the non-indigenous world is coming to realize something that has been self-evident to many of us in the Native Universe—Native knowledge is a powerful, and often prophetic, force that can help bring us all to a new understanding of life on Mother Earth (p.11).*

The Native voice is part of what makes the NMAI “museum different” (McMaster, 2011) while creating a shift for museums from being “temples to forums” (Lonetree, 2012.). Lonetree (2012) sees the NMAI as a decolonizing museum that needs to assist native communities in discussing the atrocities of the past and breaking the “veil of silence around colonialism and its consequences” believing that the process assists in healing, promoting community well-being, empowerment, and nation building (p. 5). In a tribute to Senator Inouye, Director Gover spoke of the need of “telling the truth” about Native American history, commenting, “if people only knew” more cooperation and respect would improve relationships not just with the populations at large but also to create change in government policies regarding Native Americans (Gover, 2014). In the past the Smithsonian Institute did not necessarily have native peoples in their best interest; however, today “it has earned the trust of the American people . . . We can put that to work for the benefit of Tribal Nations”(Gover, 2014). Gover’s plans for the future of the museum concerns education. From his perspective, “formal education in the United States continues to mislead”, and he wants people to place Native people in a proper context. He provides the example, “In 1492 there were as many people living in the United States as there was in Europe, it was not the wilderness depicted in history books” (Gover, 2014). Thus, Gover’s concerns and goals for the future reflect the memory of Charles Mann’s learning of American History.

### 5.1.2.3 Mission Statement

The Mission Statement for the NMAI (‘Mission’, NMAI website, 2015):

*The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is committed to advancing knowledge, and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present and future—through partnership with Native people and others. The museum works to support the*



*continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life.*

### 5.1.3 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3)

The main exhibition spaces reside on the western half of the upper levels, which allows for visual connection to the towering Atrium. Each level provides a different perspective of the architectural nuances of the interior. The museum currently has three inaugural galleries *Our Universe*, *Our Peoples*, and *Our Lives* located on the third and fourth levels where the gallery walls reflect the curvilinear structure of the façade. The third level contains the permanent *Our Lives* Exhibition, a contemporary Arts Gallery, the *Window on Collections* exhibition, and the imagiNATIONS Activity Center. The fourth level features the *Our Peoples* and *Our Universe* galleries, along with a small circular theater that provides a short multi-media introduction to the museum; the museum suggests you begin your visit here.

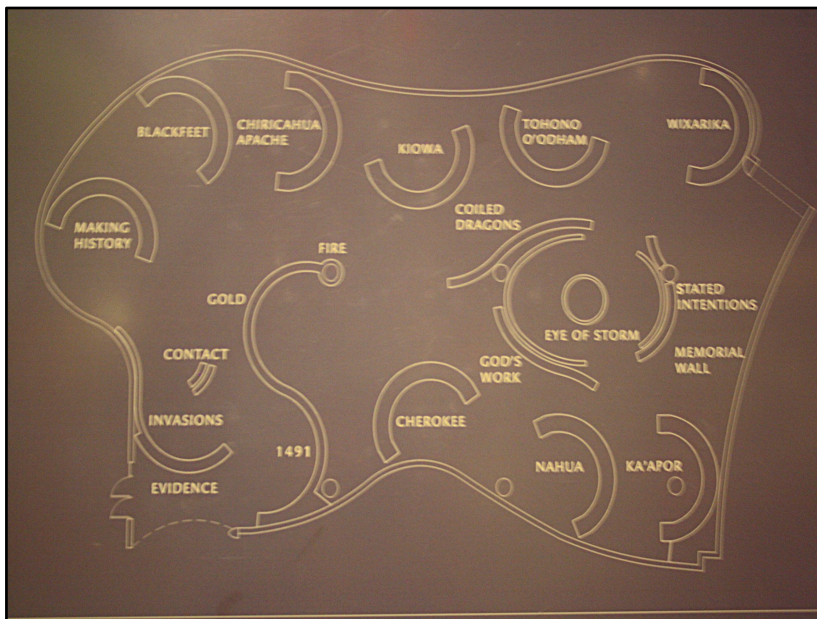
From the beginning, curators at NMAI have been working with Native communities on all phases of the exhibitions (West & Cobb, 2005). The result has been considered “successful, frustrating, confusing, and not providing the right tone” and “they (exhibits) fail to educate and inform” (Atalay, 2006, p. 601). Thus, the exhibits have received both praise (Cobb, 2005) and criticism from both Native and non-Natives (Lonetree, 2005a, 2005b; Atalay, 2006; Rothstein, 2004, 2014; Fisher, 2004). This case focuses on one exhibit in the *Our Peoples* Gallery, called *Evidence*. The exhibit received both praise and criticism from critics, as well as reflection by its curators. The exhibit ran from the museum’s opening in 2004 to 2014.

#### 5.1.3.1 Evidence: An Overview of an Exhibition<sup>5</sup>

The exhibition *Evidence* features a curving spine whose central theme, according to curator P.C. Smith (2005) was to present European contact as “the biggest thing ever, the most profound and momentous event in recorded human history” and how “it created the world as we know it today. It places Indians, and Indian experience, at the very center of world history” (p. 4). The exhibition’s “spine” presents the theme beginning with a focus on the year 1491; the year before Native Americans encountered contact.

Eight Native community exhibits surround the spine (Fig. 5.4). Members of each community worked with the help of NMAI staff to develop their exhibit,<sup>6</sup> which were meant to depict how the community has experienced the given theme of the period of contact with Europeans (Cobb, 2005b). Yet, according to curator P.C. Smith (2005; in interview, 2013), one of the gallery’s flaws was the lack of

communicating the theme to the community curators. Thus, the exhibition presented two distinctly different narratives. The communities choose to focus on a celebration of life versus how European contact affected the community. The variance in narratives created confusion for visitors and critics yet provided a learning opportunity for the museum on co-curating. In my interview with Smith, he discussed how the exhibition (8000 sq.ft.) was planned in different stages. Planning for the eight community exhibits was implemented before the development of the center spine began; thus, it was a matter for the NMAI team of curators to create the feature section in the remaining space of the gallery—thus, it was not an optimal method of developing an overall exhibition (Smith in interview, 2013).



*Figure 5.1.4 Layout of “Our Peoples” gallery, entrance is at bottom left and exit is on top right. Image used with permission of NMAI, photo 2013.*

When faced with the task of creating an exhibit for the center area, Smith stated the question became, “How do you tell the ‘big story’ in the space that remains?” Smith reflected on the process, commenting on how “the temptation to say everything in a string of exhibits is quite powerful,” and that he felt he became a “victim” of that. The “big story” refers to early genesis of the museum when leadership stated, “we would talk about genocide and conflict, and we would talk about disease” (Smith in interview, August, 2013). The question for Smith as a curator was “how do you make good on the promise” (in interview, August 2013).

In addition to the writing in 2005 by P.C. Smith, numerous others have also written about *Evidence* (Cobb, 2005; Lonetree, 2006a, 2006b; Atalay, 2006; Rickard, 2007; Segall, 2014; Ronan, 2014). In this section, an examination of the *spine* of *Evidence* presents the views and reflections of two of the curators (Paul Chaat Smith and Jolene Rickard), along with other Native American scholars. Central to this section is how the curators chose to present the narrative, considerations related to audience, and reaction to the actual exhibit. Since many have written on the exhibits featuring bibles, treaties, and guns, I focus on the initial exhibits about *Gold*, *Seventeen Ships*, *Making History*, and *All My Relations*.

The curvilinear spine of *Evidence* was the conceptual idea of guest curator Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) who was inspired by the post abstract-expressionist artwork of American sculpture Richard Serra (1938- ). P.C. Smith (2005) commented, the two sections of curvilinear walls implied disorientation and a way for the exhibit to become experiential. The entrance to the exhibit is an abstract<sup>7</sup> view of an excavation site symbolized by a fresh layer of snow on a frozen lake that reveals objects below its surface. The idea, according to P.C. Smith (2005), being what you see depends on what and where you are looking, and depending on your focus the things you see will change. Such abstraction parallels three things; (1) the NMAI's ideology that "it will look nothing like an Indian history museum is suppose to" (Smith, 2005, p.6); (2) the central idea for the exhibit was that history changes and is a matter of perspective, and (3) museums traditionally are not about challenging visitors most deeply held beliefs (Smith, 2005, p. 6).

Important to note, guiding principles of the museum are "to celebrate, protect, and support living Native cultures of the Americas—not study, classify or objectify them" (Cobb, 2005a, p. 488). Thus, this also creates a shift from traditional museum methodology or as Jolene Rickard stated, "Shake up the paradigm of colonial representation" (Rickard, 2007, p. 85). Additionally, P.C. Smith (2005) commented that museums create a "visual experience" and "people don't go around to read essays. It should be intellectually challenged and generate controversy" (p. 4). In the interview, Smith contrasted visiting an exhibition to going to a movie or reading a book. Generally you don't get up in the middle of a movie and walk out, nor do you put down a good book if you are engrossed in it, but "it creates very different expectations that an exhibition should carry that much information to be emotionally and visually powerful for a curator"(Smith in interview, August 2013). Further, he conceded that the curator's flaw "was to try to cram too much into one area" and that due to the lack of depth, some of the ideas presented were actually a "disservice" to the visitor.

According to curator, Paul Chaat Smith (2005), the Gold wall's central principals concerned "wealth and dispossession providing a new view of pre- contact as a place of riches" with focus on the abundance of wealth and power of Native America at that time (p. 6). Rickard's (2007) concurs, commenting the value of

Gold is the same now as it was then. Gold objects radiate out from a central sun image to a more abstract “shock-wave” pattern that represented the transformation of the gold from an Indigenous statement to a European one (Fig. 5.1.5). While the concept is abstract, Rickard’s (2007) belief was if audiences engage enough with it, they would “find the dark truth” (p. 89). The concept of the exhibit was that the viewer “would be struck with how different these (the objects) were from one another” was an idea that Smith suggest was a “bridge too far for visitors to sort out and define and say these are different Indians.” “It is too big an idea and needs to be explained more” (Smith in interview, August 2013). The exhibit sign, entitled ‘Gold’ written by Paul Chaat Smith read as follows:



Figure 5.1.5 The Gold Wall with inset image of text area seen in background. Images used with permission of NMAI. Photo 2013.

## GOLD

*The millions who lived in the Americas produced extraordinary wealth. Corn and gold were the paramount symbols of power and wealth. They anchored the largest civilizations: The Mexica (also known as the Aztecs), the Maya, and the Inka.*

*People across the hemisphere domesticated hundreds of varieties of corn. By perfecting the cultivation of corn, societies could support larger populations. Towns became cities. The cities built pyramids and dreamed of empire.*

*Gold was lavished on palaces, worked into jewelry and figurines, and placed outdoors to absorb and radiate the sun's powerful energy. It was never used as currency.*

The text refers to the transition of gold as a cultural symbol for Native Americans to a commodity of wealth for Europeans. Another text written by Smith entitled *Wealth, Power and Abundance* speaks of how the transfer of gold and silver had dire effect on Native Americans; as a result “perhaps 20 million Indians died as a direct result of contact. Tens of millions more perished from disease.” Smith mentioned that it was “actually silver, in terms of dollars, that was more valuable than gold” but due to the gold in the museum’s collection the focus was placed there (in interview, 2013). Text is a dominant part of the exhibit with most of it written by Smith in collaboration the exhibits other curators Ann Mullen and Jolene Rickard, but it is Smith’s name that is presented as the author.

The NMAI has a mandate that all labels are to be signed by the author to add transparency and authenticity of voice (Rickard, 2007; Smith in interview, 2013). However, as Rickard’s (2007) noted, presenting the text in this format created an imbalance between the text and the visual image. Of all the objects presented, few had individual labels on them. Rickard (2007) commented that by having Native people author labels “authority is returned to the written word instead of focusing on the multiple constructions embedded in every object on display” (pp. 90-91).<sup>8</sup> For Rickard (2007), reading an exhibit begins when a person first enters the exhibit; thus, it is not so much about the text but the overall visual “reading” that is initiated. This points to Indigenous traditional knowledge of history from a visual and oral context: a fact that some reviewers from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* failed to consider in their critique of the museum.<sup>9</sup>

The *Making History* exhibit has two portraits on a wall over a traditional wooden ethnographic museum display. The portraits are of George Gustav Heye on the right (Fig. 5.1.6see inset) and a Native American Indian in full headdress on the left—both men face each other. The portrait painting of Heye, by George Caitlin, is supported by his portraits of Native Americans on a connecting wall along with a media presentation by Floyd Favel, a Plains Cree playwright (Fig. 5.1.6). The media presentation was filmed at the National Arboretum with Favel walking between the large Doric columns that once held up the east portico of the U.S. Capitol building: columns that Presidents from Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) to Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) would have walked through (Smith, 2005).

Paul Chaat Smith (2005) explains the exhibit as “presenting the history of the NMAI” and the “tools of the collectors (both Heye and Caitlin) for study and observation” (p. 7): One collected Native American objects and the other collected images of Native Americans by painting their portraits. The video communicates to visitors, “While the past doesn’t change, the way we understand changes all the time”, it goes on to ask the visitor “to reflect on the exhibit, encounter it, and argue with it.” This is a section of the exhibit that Smith felt was “successful” and suggested it should be “one of the first things people should see” as it would help

them figure out what the museum is about (in interview, 2013). The section had a ‘Wow’ factor in my opinion *if time* was taken to listen to the short video, read the text, and draw the connection between Heye, Caitlin, and how Native Americans have been represented: for me it was the essence of the heart and soul of the museum.



Figure 5.1.6 “Making History” Exhibit. Portraits painted by Caitlin alongside multimedia featuring the narrative of Favel. Inset is portrait of Heye. Images used with permission of NMAI, photo 2013.

*All My Relations* is the last exhibit in the gallery. Hundreds, if not thousands of Native peoples tribes are listed with the words *We Are The Evidence* in the middle (Fig. 5.1.7). The wall was inspired by a wall with the names of Jewish towns on it at the Holocaust Museum in Washington (Smith in interview 2013). The signage, written by Paul Chaat Smith read:

#### *All My Relations*

*Entire nations perished in the wave of death that swept the Americas. Even their names were lost to us. We cannot tell you where they lived, what they believed, or what they dreamed of. Their experiences are buried and unknowable. Like much of Indian history, we have only fragments.*



*This wall lists the names of our relatives who are still here, with those of ancestors who vanished without a trace. The list will always be incomplete, ruptured, and fragmented. It can never be whole.*

*Nine out of ten perished. One in ten survived. All Indians alive today are here because our ancestors used intelligence, skill, planning, strategy and sacrifice. They didn't fear change; they embraced it. They survived because they fought for change on our terms.*

*Their past lives in our present. As descendants of the one in ten who wake up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we share an inheritance of grief, loss, hope and immense wealth. The brilliant achievements of our ancestors make us accountable for how we move in the world today. Their lessons instruct us, and make us responsible for remembering, especially those things we never knew.*

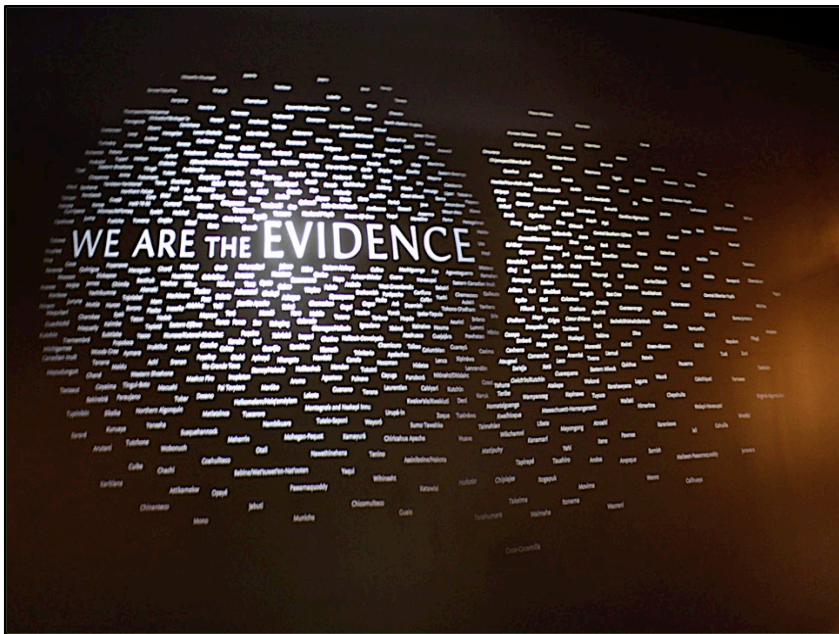


Figure 5.1.7 “All My Relations.” Thousands of names of Native peoples tribes, past and present. Images used with permission of NMAI, photo 2013.

Despite her criticism of the exhibit, Lonetree (2006b) found the wall be “profoundly moving” (p. 641). In the interview, Smith reflected that possibly the signage and wall was “too preachy”, I replied, “that it (being preachy) was not necessarily a bad thing”, he replied, “maybe not, maybe not.” The wall created a synergy from the initial white wall of snow to the final black wall celebrating living Native peoples and their ancestors of the past.

### 5.1.3.2 Tangible and Intangible: A Question of Voice

NMAI's leadership and staff believe there needs to be an emphasis on providing a Native voice in the presentation of Indigenous materials (Champagne, 2011; Atalay, 2006). Champagne questions how Native voices can be defined and presented effectively when a large percentage of the audience is non-Native. Museums present Native artifacts in one of two ways. The first way presents an object is outside its context and not within a holistic understanding of a specific culture but as a curio. The second method emphasizes history, meaning, and place within a Native community where the object materialized based on scholarly interpretation and consultation with members of the Native communities (Champagne, 2011). Champagne believes this method provides Native cultural objects with both scientific and educational value; therefore, it is a preferred method for NMAI. Plains Cree and member of the Siksika Nation, Gerald McMaster (2011), wrote, "the Native voice is embodied in seven ideas" (p. 90), and all of these ideas were confirmed by Smith during the interview in 2013:

**Subject:** Native peoples have been the marginalized in presenting and articulating their experiences: an idea that has "pervaded museums" where non- Native peoples are considered experts (p. 90);

**Multivocality:** The NMAI challenges the concept of "a single, authoritative voice by empowering multiple voices" . . .there are many voices, or consciousness's, some competing, some similar—yet all distinctly Native" (p. 91);

**Empowerment:** "Indigenous peoples have claimed the right to voice their own philosophies, histories, and identities . . . In the gallery context we can see that with empowerment comes not only a healthy relationship, but also better or truer articulation and understanding of those cultures than in the past . . . they (Native peoples) were more cautious in working with outsiders because of the perception that they were to blame for their predicament" (pp. 92-93);

**Authority:** NMAI works with communities to ensure that content of the exhibits are shaped by Native cultural authority. Agency is a more complex concept that is a "synonym for authority" and suggests that voice is not given easily that negotiation is always necessary. McMaster needed to remind a community he was working with that it was not necessary to seek the authority of outside sources be they white or Native; rather "they already had authority that was given to them by their culture" (p. 94);

**Representation:** "Native voice speaks directly to the ways of Indigenous peoples are presented, depicted and portrayed in institutional spaces, such as museums" Self representation is embraced, addressing the "historical practice that Natives were always the subjects of European or Euro-American discourse that controlled how Native



peoples were to be represented . . . depicted as “savages”, “guardians of nature”, or “vanishing” (p.95). In doing this “museums denied 10,00 years of visual history” or presented history only from the period of Contact and beyond. McMaster emphasizes, “. . . a colonial country hasn’t fully matured until it recognizes or fully represents itself to others, its true past—warts and all” (p. 95);

**Perspective:** McMaster understands voice as a “point of view, a perspective” (p. 95). The NMAI privileges the perspective of the original owners and emphasizes what the object means to Native people. This allows for a shift to meaning constructed by Native peoples versus meaning constructed over time by non-Native people; and

**Visuality:** refers to an abstract perspective that connects the visible and the tangible by encouraging visitors to consider Native objects from a Native way of thinking. McMaster provides an example of the songs that accompany the making of the weaving of baskets creates more meaning than seeing a basket hanging on a wall—the basket and the song are merged as one activity. If the song is lost, so is the intellectual tradition and knowledge that goes with understanding how things are created. Instead of a “lifeless” basket, a solitary object, the basket has life and becomes visual culture (p. 98).

NMAI’s decision to present a Native voice *shifts* the concept of “Re-representation” and provides agency to the communities in the process of negotiating what is presented (McMaster, 2011, pp. 94-95). However, he states NMAI took a lashing as critics assumed that the Native voice had supplanted the non-Native, but it was important for the museum to take on such criticism to move to the next level (p.87). The critics, in this case, were non-Native and had their own expectations of what the NMAI should be<sup>7</sup>: ‘Museum Different’ was just that – different. Yet as a curator, Smith seems to be caught somewhere in the middle. He suggested that each of the members of the twenty-four native communities represented in the museum probably had “amazing stories to tell” but suggested it would be hard for any one of them to “write so it is compelling”; thus he seemed to question how far to take the concept of “native voice” the museum promotes (in interview, 2013).

Before Smith became a curator at NMAI he was initially presented with the ten events the museum wanted to present, he could see the events were “so large, complex, and difficult,” he saw danger signs even though the concepts were “very well meaning” (in interview, August 2013). Perhaps in addition to having exhibits presented in a different voice and methodology, the museum tried to cover too much territory for the narratives to present a coherent whole.

#### 5.1.4 THE CURATOR AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4)

From the beginning “community curation” was the methodology set forth by West with NMAI’s curators in the role of ‘facilitators’; an untested method for many museums that still needs “some ironing out of the kinks” (West and Cobb, 2005, p. 525). The result has been “successful, frustrating, confusing, and not providing the right tone” (Atalay, 2006, p.601), “telling only part of the story” (Segall, 2014, p. 67), “intellectual catastrophe” (Rothstein, 2014, para.7), to “where is our history?” (Lonetree, 2006b, p. 637). Such comments refer to the degree of collaboration between the curator and source communities, and to the narratives provided. However, not all agree with the use of the term “community”. Curator, Paul Chaat Smith considers the term to be “inherently essentialist”. He expanded on his answer by questioning whether an “exhibit about Spain would really have a discussion about the Spanish community? I don’t think so” (Smith in follow-up questionnaire, April 2015).

While walking through one of the *Our Peoples* tribal exhibits, a discussion developed on source communities as curators. Smith questioned whether a tribal member is the best person to tell the tribes story, his reply, “I don’t think so, I don’t think so” (in interview, 2013). In the interview, Smith commented that the idea of the Native voice became “very literal” prompting tribal members to comment to NMAI curators, “Well you are the museum people, how are we suppose to do that?”(in interview, 2013). Does this suggest that a more balanced partnership would have kept the overall theme more cohesive in the gallery?

The notion of Indigenous curation was questioned in the follow-up with Smith. I was interested in finding out whether Smith felt the demographics of the curatorial team made a difference in how and what narratives were presented: his reply “Some of the most essentialist and reactionary projects are mounted by Native people. I don’t think generalizing helps very much.” A follow-up question received a similar response: “How would you describe the demographics (ratio) of the curatorial team (Native vs. non-Native)?” his full reply, “Again, essentialist and also boring” (follow-up questionnaire, April 2015). The intent of the question(s) was to understand *if* different knowledge systems created differences in *what* was presented and *how* it was presented. I believe his comments can be placed in context when positioned with his comments on Native voice in the previous section.

For West, as Director, the purpose of the museum was to be a public forum, a place of affirmation for Native Peoples, and a means of eliminating gaps; thus, bridges were needed to connect Native and non-Native peoples. The museum was not to be “simply about Native people, but *being of* Native people” (West and Cobb, 2005, p. 522). Consequently, *community curation* began with a letter from West to numerous tribes asking if they wanted to collaborate with the museum on an exhibit then staff went to the communities before inviting them back to Washington to

choose objects for the collection. NMAI staff wrote the text with editing by the communities who were then involved in the final sign off: a complex and complicated process (West and Cobb, 2005). Due to these changes in the paradigms of museology, and the addition of the issues presented what seem to be abstract narratives, visitors became disconcerted. Director West summed it up in an interview (West and Cobb, 2005):

*... once you've done that, which upset some people, ... you're going towards a different system of classification ... sometimes things mean something different from what people are normally use to seeing. This can be frustrating to visitors" (p. 257).*

In other words, a different form of *reading* needs to take place, as suggested by both Paul Chaat Smith and Jolene Rickard's in the previous section.

### 5.1.5 IN SUMMARY

Survivance. The National Museum of the American Indian is about survivance not "dominance, tragedy or victimry" (Visenor, 1998, p. 15). From its conception, through the work of Senator Daniel K. Inouye (Democrat, Hawaii) and Representative Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Democrat, Colorado) and others, the message the museum needed to provide would be one that told the truth about Native Americans. Empowerment, improving cooperation and respect could be gained "if people only knew" (Gover, 2014). Two critical notions for former Director W. Richard West were; (1) the museum promoted Native Americans as living cultures, and (2) a Native voice was present throughout. It was to be *museum different*, Native voices would be heard and taken seriously as part of the national discussion. In presenting this case three dominant themes emerged: living culture, and native voice–native knowledge merge, and interconnectedness.

The concept of living culture began with the Act that created requested the museum be "a living memorial" (Sec 3); therefore, placing the building as part of a Native landscape signifies the long road for Native Americans to reclaim the Native land it sits on. Native voices from across the Western Hemisphere joined together in developing all aspects of the buildings design; a reflection of Native Americans sense of place. The incorporation of the various materials, plantings, water features, and rocks all reflect specific Native circular time and connectivity to all living things. These things bring in intangible aspects, not necessarily obvious to non-Natives, but creating a sense of Native place for those who are. Living culture is reflected in the visual and oral narratives provided in the galleries; from creation stories, to *Evidence* of what was and still is, to celebrating cultural differences within the various Native communities. It is reflected as well in the ongoing performances, media presentations, and symposiums that take place within the

Potomac Atrium and the other theatre halls. Living culture is reflected in objects both inside and outside the museum having a history; it is not about an object as a collected artifact of 'Other'—objects have life, and meaning passed down through the ancestors. The idea of museum as living culture signifies another way of knowing. The concept of living culture, whether implicit or explicit, is present in all four layers (L1-L4).

Native voice / Native knowledge is another theme that emerged. It began with Bill HR 2668 and was later incorporated through the American Indian Act that specified the majority of board members must be Native American, and that Native voices were to be included in *all* aspects of museum planning, development and ongoing activities. Additionally, it is referenced to in the museum's Mission statement in the phrase 'through partnership with Native peoples'. Native voice embodies more than multivocality; it also refers to self-empowerment, authority, and representation. The notion of the building as being part of the landscape, along with providing authority and empowerment to twenty-four Native communities to present their narratives as exhibits, the employing Native Americans as museum practitioners and as a holding the majority on the museum's board *all speak to providing specific voice* that has been silenced for too long. While some Native American critics, such as Amy Lonetree, suggest the narratives need to confront the hardships and genocide incurred after European contact and into contemporary times; the museum has taken the initial steps to develop a new method of presenting Native American narratives.

Current Museum Director Kevin Gover (2014) signaled a change towards improving such narratives through increasing the educational aspect of exhibits beginning with the *Nation to Nation* exhibit on Treaties (current exhibition at the time of this writing). The goal of the educational program is to correct misconceptions and bias presented in the United States formal education system related to the history of Native Americans. Critical comments regarding the content of the exhibitions from Lonetree (2005a, 2005b) and Atalay (2006) seemed to have been heard, and reflections on what could have been done by the curators also seems to have been addressed in the comments made by Smith in the interview and Gover at the symposium in May of 2014.

The two themes presented above are interconnected, which developed into the third theme that emerged. The architecture of the building, its landscape (physical and natural), its position on the National Mall, the voice of the narratives presented and the Native voices behind them, the partnership between museum practitioners and Native American communities, the terminology incorporated in Public Law 101-185 all are unified in Native spirituality of interconnectedness. Thus, there is no question if the four layers affect one another; at the NMAI, the borders between the layers seem to dissolve as they merge into one synergetic unit. Returning to the words of W. Richard West at the museum's opening, "We (the museum). . . are part

of the cultural heritage of every person hearing these words today, whether you are Native or non-Native” (Cobb, 2005b, p. 361). I would venture to guess that it is this sentiment that prompted Smith to answer questions on Indigenous curation and demographics of the curators as “essentialist.”

## ENDNOTES:

### INTRODUCTION

1. Ghandi, M. (1952). *Mahatma*, Vol. 5, p. 11.

<http://www.mkgandhi.org/voiceoftruth/civilizationandculture.htm>

### 5.1. NMAI

1. Duane Champagne is a professor of sociology and American Indian Studies at the University of California- Los Angeles and a member of the faculty Advisory Committee for the university's Native Nations Law and Policy Center. He has authored more than 125 publications. 2011, *In Past, Present, and Future: Challenges of the National Museum of the American Indian*, Smithsonian Press, Washington D.C., p. 74.

2. In addition to being an author and art critic, Paul Chaat Smith is an associate curator at the National Museum of American Indian and is the curator I interviewed in August 2013. Most of the authors referenced in this case are of Native American heritage- this is intentional so the voice provided is from their point of view. Several articles, books, or lectures by Smith are cited in addition to comments from the interview and the follow-up questionnaire.

3. In 2011 the U.S. Green Building Council awarded the museum the Leed Silver rating. It is the first and only Smithsonian museum to receive the award. The award was received due to the museum energy savings, water efficiency, indoor environment air quality, its being a sustainable site, and for its support of environmental research and public programs promoting environmental challenges that reflect Native Americans traditional knowledge.

4. W. Richard West, Jr. “From Cherokee Nation to Georgia to the National Museum of the American Indian: Images of Indian Culture,” speech 10 September 1990 Oklahoma College of Law, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

5. The method of collaborative curation was set out in the National Museum of the American Indian Act and created a non-traditional method of curation from typical museological approaches. “It involves not just the exhibit but also methods of care and preservation, display, classification and privileges Native conceptualization of history and truth” (Cobb, 2005a, p. 493).

6. Two curators of the Evidence exhibit were Paul Chaat Smith, whom I interviewed and Jolene Rickards. Both have written about the exhibit and their voice is presented as much as possible in this section.

7. Native American Scholar Amy Lonetree (HoChunk) criticized the exhibits’ abstractness as an incorrect choice to “educate a nation” (2006b, p. 640).

8. In the interview in August of 2013, Paul Chaat Smith discussed a related idea. He has a concept of an ‘Evidence machine’ that would tell the biography of specific objects. Instead of saying it was from a certain era and was used for whatever, it would state what happened when it left the hands of Indian people. Object A was taken by so and so and then purchased by collector X before being passed on to Museum Y and presented in this exhibit before moving onto Z. A clever idea, and if anyone reading this considers using it, remember to give credit where credit is due: Paul Chaat Smith! By the way, no one on the team thought the idea was as good as he did.

9. Journalistic critiques: Marc Fisher, “Indian Museum’s Appeal, Sadly only Skin Deep”, *The Washington Post*, 21 September 2004; Edward Rothstein, Who should Tell history, Tribes or the Museums? *The New York Times*, 21 December 2004; Edward Rothstein,

Understanding Wasn't Mutual: 'Nation to Nation' at Museum of American Indian, 21 October, 2014, *The Washington Post*; Peggy McGlone, "National Museum of the American Indian uses a new exhibit to spread its message", *The Washington Post*, 3 October 2014).

## 5.2. THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA (TE PAPA), WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AOTEOROA)

*E ngā pū, e ngā take, tau mai.  
Tau mai i runga i ngā tā kōrero e iri tonu nei i runga tare whare.  
Tau mai o roto i ngā tā kōwaiwhai e mau nei.  
Tau mai! Tau mai! Tau mai!*

The Māori saying above is the last verse of *He Mihi* and translates as: “The morning bird calls. The sun rises up. It stands aloft and shines. Our ancestors gather. They return to the source. Their aspirations fuel us. We gather. And listen to the walls. Their words remain etched forever. Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!” The quote appears in *Aoteoroa*, whose author uncovers oral narratives of Māori origins into the written word (Winitana, 2001):

*Māori traditions are entirely oral . . . they are not mere myths, legends, fables and stories. Rather they are part of tribal histories, sub-tribal histories and whakapapa or lineage, which is the prime axis upon which the Maori world turns. Because the approach is holistic in nature, we see ourselves in our mountains, our rivers and lakes, and even the trees and the birds. They are all inextricably part of our own physical lineage (pp. 11-12).*

It is believed Eastern Polynesian peoples first settled New Zealand between 1250 and 1300 AD (Te Ahukaramū, 2015). The Maori are the ancestors of these people. According to documentation, first contact with Europeans began with the travels of a Dutch man, Abel Tasman in 1642. It was over a hundred years later when Capt. James Cook of the British Royal Navy arrived in 1769 (Te Ahukaramū, 2015). After Cook, missionaries, whalers, and traders from Europe and America arrived. New Zealand became a British Crown Colony after the British Crown and Māori chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. In the signing of the treaty, the Maori gave the British Crown the right to govern and develop settlement and the Crown guaranteed Māori full protection of their interests and status and full citizenship rights. The treaty was written in both Māori and English; however, the translation was not direct and contained many discrepancies. The treaty remains an important guiding principle for the nation and within the museum sector in New Zealand (McCarthy, 2011; Hutoitōi in interview, 2012). Thus, interpreting the treaty correctly depends on the knowledge and cultural understanding of the Maori terminology.

The 1860s and 1870s were a period of land wars and collecting of gold. Following this period Scottish and English settler areas increased precipitously. The new residents to New Zealand saw themselves as the “better Britons of the South Pacific” (McCarthy, 2011. p.7). When Great Britain joined the European Economic Community, it changed the market began a process of disconnection, a step that led to internal turbulence in respect to cultural identity brought about by economic change, new electorates and various other social forces (McCarthy, 2011).



*Figure 5.2.1 The main entrance is on the city or Pākehā side of Te Papa. Image used with permission of The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, A.J. Cole, photo 2012.*

The opening of Te Papa in 1998 was an important event as it replaced the former Dominion Museum established in 1907 and its predecessor the Colonial Museum in 1865 (McCarthy, 2007, 2011). The timing of the Te Papa's opening placed it squarely within the global rebirth of the museum industry with its shift from “collections centered philosophy to one that is relationship-oriented and promotes collaboration” (Williams, 2001, p. 1). Such a shift placed it as a leader of “museumological postmodernity” (Williams, 2001, p.2). Conal McCarthy (2011)<sup>1</sup> reminds his readers, New Zealand was no different than any other nation with a colonial past: changes in New Zealand museums are due to radical changes in governance. Changes in methods of exhibition and collection management were part of a process that evolved from a “transnational phenomenon—namely a debate about the politics of collecting and exhibiting the culture of colonized people”



(McCarthy, 2011, p. 3). Biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi are reflected in the museum's name being in both English and Māori. The Māori part of the name refers to a container of treasures: treasures that hold both tangible and intangible meaning, which refers back to the opening quote and the importance of passing on knowledge through oral traditions.

### 5.2.1 ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN (L1)

The museum is situated on a prominent point of Wellington's city center and harbor front. The museum's physical and cultural space is central to the societal issue of 'race' and the relations between Māori and Pākehā, the name given to European New Zealanders (Macdonald, 1998). As with other recently built national museum's, Te Papa critics alleged it is less of a museum and more a theme park with its interactive exhibitions, cafes, and gift shop—a point countered by former Te Papa Director of Visitor Programmes and Services who suggests it encompasses both aspects and challenges people to reformulate the concept of museum (Tramposch, 1998).

The building designed by Jasmax Architects of New Zealand, is based on "reference to the settlement patterns of Maori and Pakeha" (Bossely, 1998, n.p.). Pete Bossley was the Design Director on the project and Ivan Mercup was the principal architect. The Māori exhibition area and the Marae were positioned in view of the sea and the nature of the surrounding hills, while the Pākehā area is oriented to the urban grid pattern of the city (Fig. 5.2.1). Between the two is a large ceremonial concourse, and a five-story veranda under a floating roof that provides separate identities while it also provides a space to meet (Bossely, 1998). Macdonald (1998) views the tripartite structure as a depiction of "race and empire" and suggests the divide between the two "serves to de-emphasize the interaction" or biculturalism that takes place between New Zealanders of any race (p. 82). In figure 5.2.1, the roofline of the entrance follows the same tripartite structure where each end points to either Māori or Pākehā residents.

The main entry area moves people from the city towards the sea via a long ramp or stairs that move people upwards through the entry space to the exhibition areas. A charcoal colored wall slicing through the building represents the fault line that actually runs under the museum. Each of the five levels has a theme: the first level contains the gift shop, café and entrance to Bush city; second level focuses on the natural environment while the third provides exhibits on peoples impact on the land. The fourth level reflects social history and is the location of the Maori exhibition area, the *Treaty of Waitangi*, *Passports*, and *Slice of Heaven* exhibits. The fifth level is the National Art Gallery. From each level the other floors are in view due to the design of the towering atrium, so while the building encompasses

five levels the open design of the interior keeps them integrated and provides a sense of activity taking place on the other levels (Fig. 5.2.2).



Figure 5.2.2 Te Papa's logo and the interior of the Main Entrance. Images used with permission of The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. A.J.Cole, photos 2012.

Outside the main entrance, three boulders symbolize the museum's "commitment to New Zealand's land and people" (Te Papa website, 2015). The middle stone represents Papatua (Earth Mother); the stone nearest the city center represents Tangata Whenua (Maori), and the one closest to the museum *Tangata Tiriti* (people in NZ by right of the Treaty of Waitangi). The first two stones are andesite lava that erupted from Mt. Taranki around 75,000 years ago, and the other is Karama granite, an igneous rock (350 million years old) from north of Karama representing the diversity of Tangata Tiriti in New Zealand (Te Papa website, 2015). As a visitor, my observation was that the boulders seemed misplaced and would have provided more "native" connection had they been placed on the "Māori side" closer to the landscaped area.

Native landscaping was developed in two areas: the outdoor entrance to the ceremonial marae and the exhibit *Bush City*. The marae entrance has a selection of native plants donated by different iwis to adorn the Te Ara a Tane or "the pathway of man." The area softens an otherwise hard façade of the building's exterior despite it having the harbor nearby. The native landscape established in Bush City

lies to the east side of the building; however, the two level space is entered from inside the museum and recaptures the natural world of the area as it was two hundred years ago (Te Papa website, 2015). Unlike the NMAI, there is no landscape around the building itself, as the entrance is more of an extension of the concrete jungle of Wellington.

### **5.2.2 GOVERNING BODY AND DOCUMENTS (L2)**

The 1980s in New Zealand was a period of increased sense of national identity while at the same time a “massive economic restructuring was taking place . . . resulting in considerable social disruption and increased unemployment” (Tramposch, 1998, p. 341) it was a monocultural nation where government policy tipped the scales toward the Pākehā. Thus, a background was set for the former Prime Minister, Sir Wallace Rowling, to call for the development of a new national museum where the “soul of the nation would be exposed” (in Tramposch, 1998, p. 341). During the period of planning for the museum, most members of the cabinet opposed it; however, it had the backing of Jim Bolger, the Prime Minister and vote ended in a favorable decision (Tramposch, 1998). Another issue arose was the choice of Wellington over Auckland as Wellington at that time was not considered a tourist destination; something the opening of Te Papa changed.

#### **5.2.2.1 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992**

Biculturalism begins with the museum’s name in both English and Māori. From its purpose and the performance functions it clearly presents an inclusive beginning, pointing specifically to not just Māori practices but incorporates all cultural heritages within the country.

##### **ARTICLE 4: Purpose of Act (n.p.)**

The purpose of this Act is to establish a National Museum that, under the name Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, shall provide a forum in which the nation may present, explore, and preserve both the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order better:

- (a) to understand and treasure the past; and
- (b) to enrich the present; and
- (c) to meet the challenges of the future.

##### **ARTICLE 8: Performance of Functions (n.p.)**

In performing its functions the Board shall—

- (a) have regard to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of New Zealand, and the contributions they have made and continue to make to New Zealand's cultural life and the fabric of New Zealand society:
- (b) endeavour to ensure both that the Museum expresses and recognises the mana and significance of Maori, European, and other major traditions and cultural heritages, and that the Museum provides the means for every such culture to contribute effectively to the Museum as a statement of New Zealand's identity:
- (c) endeavour to ensure that the Museum is a source of pride for all New Zealanders

Museum scholar on the Australasian region, Paul Williams, commented that in the branding of the museum its title became "Our Place" creating a microcosm for evoking 'nation', while suggesting the coziness and security of being home (Williams, 2005). Te Papa's logo, a thumbprint, suggests a commitment to "issues of identity, belonging, and the unique mark the people have culturally imprinted on the nation space" (Williams, 2001, p. 4) and the unique mark citizens have imprinted on the nation's geographical space" (Williams, 2005, p. 83). The designers of the logo envisioned the open spaces within the thumbprint to be a "maze' of the a-mazing stories told at Te Papa" (catobrandpartners.com, 2015). Despite this, it seems not everyone favored the logo as it was referred to as "crude, sinister, irrelevant," and dubbed "Te Thumbprint" (O'Neill, 2015).

In the interview with curator Hutoitōi, the significance of a bicultural museum came up in comments concerning historical context of museums where ethnologists, as experts on Indigenous cultures would tell the story then take different kinds of traditions and merge them together to create their own narrative, which was then placed on the museum floor as an exhibition. "This", Hutoitōi commented, "is quite disempowering to Indigenous peoples . . . times have changed and those theories are dated" (Hutoitōi in interview, 2012). This is aligned with Tramosch's comments above and points to the benefits of Te Papa being a bicultural museum especially in the representation of Indigenous people whose voice is now heard.

The Te Papa Museum Board of Trustees identified an aim connected to four principles for the museum; (1) it would be "bicultural"; (2) it would be customer focused, (3) it would speak with the authority that comes from scholarship and *Mātauranga Māori* (Maori scholarship); and (4) it would have to be "commercially positive" (Tramosch, 1998, p. 344). The third point is developed from a deep respect for lineage (*whakapapa*) and sensitivity for different ways of knowing (Tramosch, 1998). Within this context, the museum staff works together to understand how and when both forms of knowledge can work together and recognize there may be times it is better to keep them separate. Tramosch (1998)

commented at that time most researchers employed by the museum had Western academic backgrounds, which created the need to increase employment of Māori staff that could be conversant in Mātauranga Māori to create a balance. In section four of the museum's 2014/15 Annual Report, the four principles mentioned above are divided into 'Te Papa's Performance Framework' where the terminology has changed to include the concept of being a *forum* and emphasizes environmental concerns (Te Papa Annual Report, 2014-15, p. 19).

### 5.2.2.2 Governance and Management

With the museum's strong bicultural framework, management believes having Maori in upper management level is fundamental for the museum to make upper level decisions (McCarthy, 2011). Arapata Hakiwai (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Porou, and Ngāi Tahu), a Maori scholar is the current *Kaihautū* (guardian) at Te Papa (Annual Report 2013-14), (McCarthy, 2011). In his current position, Hakiwai provides bicultural leadership, acts as guardian of taonga, maintains relationships with iwis, and shares leadership with the museum's director (Church, 2013). Thus, the museum has a dual management system where the CEO (a Pākehā) and Kaihautū work together. Sitting as the head of the Museum is the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage with the Board of Museum under him or her, followed by the CEO and Kaihautū (Te Papa Annual Report 2014-15).

In *Museums and Māori*, McCarthy (2011) writes about former Kaihautū, Te Taru White (2000-2007) who felt there was "often a gap between verbal equality and the structural power around it" between the Director and himself. An incident is highlighted where the CEO tried to pass a restricting proposal that would affect Maori staffing without consulting the Kaihautū. White rose from his seat, performed a fierce haka and then addressed the CEO telling him: "You have insulted me, you have insulted my people, and when my people are offended like this they will stand up and leave the meeting and that's exactly what I'm going to do right now" (in McCarthy, 2011, p. 119). When White was appointed it went through the CEO versus the board, which is how the position is appointed currently. A similar situation between Kaihautū Cliff Whiting and CEO Dame Cheryl Sotheran took place in 1996 during planning stages for the museum and is described in the next section.

### 5.2.2.3 Bicultural Policy

Te Papa is a bicultural organization where the board acknowledges the Treaty of Waitangi, particularly the concept of partnership that is implied in it. The formal policy as written in the annual Report 2014-15 is:

*Biculturalism at Te Papa is the partnership between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti recognizing the legislative, conceptual, and Treaty*

*framework within which the Museum operates as well as reflecting international development. This framework provides the mandate for the Museum to express and celebrate the natural and cultural diversity of New Zealand. It acknowledges the unique position of Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand and the need to secure their participation in the governance management, and operation of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (p.15).*

Biculturalism is easier said than done. During a planning meeting in 1996 where Cliff Whiting<sup>2</sup> as the Kaihautū, presented his design plans for the marae to then CEO Dame Cheryll Sotheran and other executive members.<sup>3</sup> During the meeting, a seemingly condescending tone was taken by Sotheran when questioning some of Whiting's considerations, while another Pakeha member suggested rather adamantly that the marae needed to be less Maori and more a accommodating for all cultures. To this Whiting politely reminded the member (author's personal transcript from YOUTUBE<sup>3</sup>, 2015):

*A Marae is a marae because it is Maori. If you take any aspect away from it without their involvement it will be something else. The challenge is knowing what we want to use it for, and how we want to use it . . . and then to flex their customary role to accept that. It is to satisfy both—not compromise.*

Whiting's point was that it was not for someone outside Maori culture to come in and make changes. While the Pākehā member was speaking to Whiting, Sotheran, who evidently had the nickname of "Te Mama" and "Chernobyl" due to her ill-mannered temper (Hewitson, 2007), looked bored and tired of the topic and seemed content to let another person take up her argument. Later in the YOUTUBE video she commented rather dejectedly that she could "no longer see the view of the water and hills" from the marae due to the opaque glass used in the stained glass windows and doorway; another of Whiting's designs she did not agree with.<sup>4</sup> There were similar videos found earlier that conveyed the same sort of difficulties and frustrations between Pākehā and Māori members in the initial planning of Te Papa, those videos are no longer online.

American museum scholar Elaine Heumann Gurian acted as a consultant for Te Papa in its planning stages for four years. As an outsider, she provides the following view of working within the framework of biculturalism (in McCarthy, 2011):

*To me the most profound and interesting part of the process has been to watch the internalization, institution-wide, of the bicultural process. It has been one thing to mouth the aspiration of being inclusive, another to try it. For all of us who have tried it, it is darned difficult. Difficult*

*because integration is not only about content but also about world view, about values, about issues of time, of collaboration, disputational style, and the issues of supervision. In short, real biculturalism demands an understanding and acceptance by leadership of entirely different work and thinking patterns and creating pathways, for it to work effectively in running an organization (p.124).*

Gurian points to the significant role leadership plays in establishing biculturalism and the complexity involved in its process; additionally for New Zealand there are more than two cultures to be represented. Te Taru White clarifies that ‘multiculturalism’ is inclusive within the framework of the Treaty where the Maori are one partner and the government as the other partner represents all other cultures (McCarthy, 2011). Research has shown that if the managers embrace Māori values into their teams there is cohesion, but if that commitment is weak it is reflected in the team (McCarthy, 2011). For Te Papa staff the concept of ‘te iwi kainga’ should apply to all, not just to Māori staff, in order to support Māori protocol and biculturalism (McCarthy, 2011, p. 122). The term refers to working as one group—one iwi.

#### **5.2.2.4 Mission Statement**

Mission: (The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992, Section 4):

The purpose of this Act is to establish a National Museum that, under the name Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, shall provide a forum in which the nation may present, explore, and preserve both the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order better—to understand and treasure the past; and to enrich the present; and to meet the challenges of the future.

#### **5.2.2.5 Mana Taonga**

Mana taonga is an important guiding principle practiced by all Te Papa staff. Api Mahuika developed the concept while a member of the advisory group Ngā Kaiwaowao. The principle was endorsed in 1992 by the board and become corporate policy in 2003 (McCarthy, 2011). The principle incorporates values and modes of understanding that are inherently Māori, yet it is observed for the entire collection at the museum (Smith, 2011). Huhana Smith (2011) further explains the principle:

*Mana taonga acknowledges the spiritual and cultural connections of taonga with their people through whakapapa of the taonga’s creator,*

*the ancestors after whom the taonga is named and the whānau (family), hupū (sub-tribe) or iwi (tribe) to whom the taonga belongs. This mana is linked to taonga, both old and new, where meaning, values, histories and associated stories accumulate and appreciate through the generations and over time. For Te Papa this means respecting the rights of the iwi to play a part in the care of taonga, to speak about them and to determine their use. The principle acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of taonga and draws upon these qualities to enliven connections with tribal and family representatives (p. 133).*

Some critics thought it took a Maori concept and superseded local tribal authority with a government mandate (McCarthy, 2011). However, McCarthy states the policy was practical and enabled all New Zealand iwis to be involved in the museum without the veto of the local iwi. Due to this, iwis have to grant permission for the use of any reproduction of images or loan of items creating a slow process that some curators find frustrating and quite bureaucratic (McCarthy, 2011), a process the author entailed in completing this research.<sup>5</sup>

#### **5.2.2.6 Mātauranga Māori**

The first attempt to develop Mātauranga Māori was in 1996 with a policy document on research and scholarship providing information on traditional and contemporary knowledge (McCarthy, 2011). The policy became necessary due to debates that grew out of developing exhibitions where Western knowledge and Maori ways of knowing needed to be next to one another (McCarthy, 2011). The term refers to aspects of the Māori world both past and present (Johnstone, 2005). As a curator the concept “privileges research, interpretation and display of Māori artifacts and is carried out in a way which reinforces and reflects Māori world viewpoints and Indigenous philosophies . . . and helps us work effectively with our communities” (Hutoitoi, in follow-up, 2015). Within the Rauemi Resource Guide for Te Papa and other New Zealand Museums (Johnstone, 2005) the term is described as:

*Mātauranga Māori is a dynamic and evolving system of knowledge (te kauwae runga and te kauwae raro) used by tangata whenua (people of this land by right of first discovery) to interpret and explain the world in which they live. It is framed by the whakapapa (genealogy) of all things and whanaungatanga (kinship connections) between them. Examples of mātauranga Māori include: Oral histories of whanau (families), hapu (extended families) and iwis (tribes); kataka (prayers and incantations); and waiata (songs) (p. 3).*

The knowledge referred to encompasses spiritual knowledge held by specific people from day to day experiences developed within a field of work (i.e., fishing,



cultivating land, handicrafts). It involves traditional knowledge that often is specific to family, extended family, and iwis (Johnstone, 2005).

Within the collections and research department lies the Mātauranga Māori Team. The team is made up of Maori staff working in different departments at the museum. It is comprised of “one senior curator, four curators, four collection managers, a researcher, and a scholar” (McCarthy, 2011, p. 122). The team undertakes scholarship and research for exhibitions, publications and research projects to make sure knowledge of Māori collections is accessible to a large audience. The Te Papa curator interviewed, ‘Hutoitoti’ is part of this group.<sup>6</sup>

### 5.2.3 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3)

The Maori exhibition area, *Mana Whenua*, celebrates Māori as *tangata whenua*—the original people. The exhibition is located on the fourth level to the left (waterside) of the Treaty of Waitangi exhibit and is entered by walking under a large contemporary wooden sculpture depicting a birdlike creature by an Māori artist; the sculpture reflects one of many images seen in the rock art found on the South Island (Hutoitoti, in interview 2012). At the time of the interview, the *Mana Whenua* exhibit area consists of an iwi specific exhibit, a *Mori* (Chatham Islands peoples) exhibit<sup>7</sup>, a large open area containing a five hundred year old wharepuni (house) an early traditional meetinghouse and whaneui, and several other small exhibits around the perimeter. Due to the bicultural context, all textual information is in both Maori and English. The museum’s website (2015) describes the exhibit as:

*. . . you can experience something of the richness, complexity, and dynamism of Māori life and heritage. The concept of ‘mana whenua’ has many layers of meaning. It tells of important relationships that Māori have with whenua (land) and of the value placed upon the land within the culture. . . . The exhibition celebrates the mana (power) of the culture through taonga tuku iho (treasures handed down) such as the woven and carved works, waka (canoes), and whare (buildings) such as the meetinghouse Te Hau ki Turanga and the storehouse Te Takinga.*

Based on the policies of mātauranga māori and mana taonga, the Māori curators work together with the various iwis and design teams to create the exhibit space (Hutoitoti in interview, 2012). The permanent exhibit is *Mana Whenua*, while a specific iwi exhibit changes every two and a half years. The temporary iwi exhibit is part of the iwi exhibition program and *mana taonga*, the role of the community’s in understanding and caring of the collections (Te Papa website, 2015). The iwi *Kaumātua* (elders) are in residence at the museum for the period and reside over ceremonial duties pertaining to the marae. The *Tainui* iwi of the North Island were

in charge during the time of the interview in 2012. A new iwi exhibit opened in 2015 and will continue into 2017.

Māori curators use Indigenous modes of display that promote how their past has led to their survival: a key to this is considering the taonga on display are not simply placed in an obscure context, but that they are “living links taonga that never died” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 57). This creates a different way of knowing specific to Māori knowledge passed down thorough the generations (Hutoitoi in interview, 2012). According to Hutoitoi:

*Indigenous curators, carry an added level of accountability to their people in the care and interpretation of indigenous cultural treasures. An indigenous curator may also be required may also be required to care for the spiritual wellbeing of the collections and working according to tikanga—proper cultural protocol. It is a privilege position which carries with it great responsibility (in follow-up questionnaire, 2015).*



Figure 5.2.3. Moriori Exhibit: Bark carvings in center and image showing rock art (right). Image used with kind permission of Maui Solomon, through Hokotehi Moriori Trust, photo 2012.

As at the NMAI, the displays in the *Mana Whenua* gallery placed more emphasis on the visual than the textual. Walking through the gallery, I noticed there was a limited amount of large exhibit cases with objects. I recall seeing only two in the

entire exhibition area: one in the Moriori Chatham Island exhibit showing tree carvings or bark art, various artifacts, and a large mural size photograph of rock art (Fig. 5.2.3), and the other a large artistically designed display of juxtaposed wooden flutes that was anything but a traditional ethnographic display. Throughout the gallery, lighting was used to highlight specific areas and to direct light downward as if to provide stepping-stones directing guests through the gallery. The large open space and darkened environment created a salient setting for a large Whare and Meetinghouse, which are traditional Māori buildings. The buildings and the other exhibits provide examples of the contextual applications used by curators. In the interview, Hutoittoi commented (2012):

*We are presenting our culture so it is not all set in the past and it is somewhat tricky to because the balk of our collection has a strong 19<sup>th</sup> century bias, but we want to bring everything through to the present to show that continuum.*

In a summation of exit interviews of visitors to the Mana Whenua exhibit conducted by Conal McCarthy in 2001, he surmised the Māori audience saw the exhibition as “being by Maori rather than about Māori” (McCarthy, 2007, p. 196). Others commented, “People are named, Tikanga is there . . . it is a comfortable space;” “there appears to be a greater sensitivity to the cultural needs of the taonga presented;” and “it appears that there is an effort to protect, preserve, and present in ways which are appropriate.” Pākehā visitors mentioned objects were presented from a Māori point of view and suggested this gave the objects a better context (McCarthy, 2007, pp. 194-96). This points to two things, first Hutoittoi’s concern that the exhibits speak to the Maori audience first and foremost seems to have succeeded (in interview, 2012), and second, the appreciation by Pākehā visitors of the context of the exhibition points to the effectiveness of the nations bicultural policies.

Sensitivity to taonga, and creating exhibits that are “culturally affirming, empowering, interesting, and inspiring for Māori . . . accessible and of interest to multiple audiences, including all New Zealanders and international visitors” are values held by Te Papa Māori curators (Hutoittoi, in follow-up questions, 2015). For Hutoittoi, exhibits should be “transformative and carry out the museum’s stated vision, Changing Hearts, Changing Minds.” At the end of the Mana Whenua exhibition is one of three entrances to the contemporary Marae: another allows entrance from the exterior (the men’s ceremonial entrance), and there is a ceremonial access from the first level (the woman’s ceremonial entrance).

### 5.2.3.1 A Place for Coming Together

A large Pounomu<sup>8</sup> boulder with water running over it greets visitors entering Te Papa's modern Marae *Rongomaraeroa Te Hono ki Hawaiki*. Designed by Māori artist Cliff Whiting and Nga Kaiwawao, the Marae was conceived as a communal space for all New Zealanders (Te Papa website, 2015). Whiting is one of New Zealand's most famous artists known for his use of bold colors; a point clearly reflected in the design of the marae, which has often criticized as not conforming to traditional to Māori values. Whiting led apprentice carvers from New Zealand in the construction of a modernist or "unorthodox" approach of a marae (Williams, 2005, p. 85). McCarthy (2007) refers to a critic who felt the marae was "tacky, gaudy, or demeaning in contrast with real Māori art" seen in the main exhibit area (p. 190). The comments McCarthy refers to are interesting, when set in the context of a pre-board meeting in July 1996 between several Te Papa executives and Cliff Whiting where the Director, Dame Cheryl Sotheran, voiced her concerns on the marae's design.

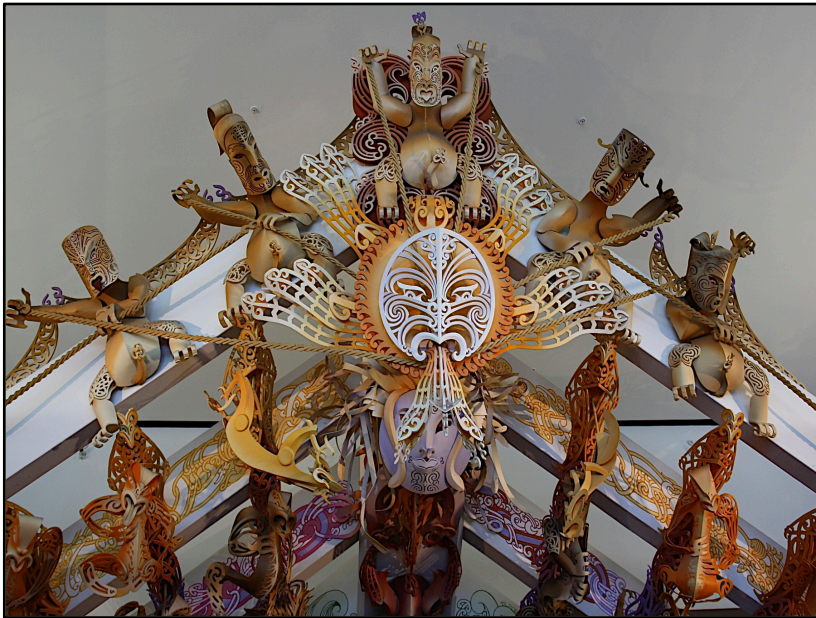
The Marae is a kaleidoscopic of colors reflecting the flora, fauna, and rainbows Māori ancestors would have seen. The carvings are made of MDF for the ease of forming three-dimensional art forms and to save the use of native timber (Te Papa website; Hutoitoi in interview, 2012). The museums' website also suggest the colors spread through the Marae "like a rainbow" providing a connection not just to Māori ancestors but "to all peoples and to all peoples origins."

Marae's have been central to Māori culture for thousands of years and developed from Polynesian culture (McCarthy, 2011). Over the past 40 years there has been a rejuvenation of Māori art and language; thus, according to Williams (2005) the construction of the marae at Te Papa signaled a reawakening of Māori culture and a gesture of the nation's need *to be seen* as publically supporting the program to encourage Māori culture. While William's may have a point from the Pākehā side, Hutoitoi commented that some iwi elders had concerns about its modern 21st century design, commenting, "What is that?" (Hutoitoi in interview, April 2012). Te Papa is the only museum in the world to have a functioning marae (Williams, 2005, McCarthy, 2011). In order to understand the marae as a functioning exhibition space a brief background of its customary importance for Māori culture is provided.

A traditional marae area is comprised of a meetinghouse (*wharenui*) and often a church (*whare karakia*). The Marae is the open meeting area in front of the wharenui and is the center of community life (Otago University, 2010). The wharenui is an expression of tribal identity and is a place where many celebrations and functions occur including spiritual gatherings. For Māori the wharenui is an ancestor; it is a living presence (Smith, 2011, Williams, 2005). The wharenui at Te Papa is named *Te Hono ki Hawaiki*, which speaks to Hawaiki being the place of

Māori spiritual origins (Te Papa website, 2015). An untraditional feature places it on the floor instead of being raised above it—something many elders questioned when they first saw it (Hutoitōi in interview, 2012). Hutoitōi mentioned the various colors and patterns were also problematic for the different designers to coordinate during the design phase; some artists were concerned colors clashed instead of being complementary to another’s design (in interview, 2012).

Traditional Māori narratives passed down through the ancestors are depicted within the Marae. At the top of the wharenui sits *Māui* (Fig. 5.2.4), a trickster demigod well known in Polynesian cultures, who is depicted as capturing the sun (Te Ahukaramū, 2015). According to Polynesian legend, Māui and his mother thought day light hours were too short and this caused them to do less work. Māui thought if the sun moved slower across the sky there would be more hours of daylight. So he made ropes out of flax, and used them to catch the sun as it rose, then he beat the sun with the magic jawbone of his grandmother. After the beating, the sun was so



*Figure 5.2.4 Māui, on the top of the Wharenui. Image used with permission of The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, photo, 2012.*

weak it could only creep along its course making the days light longer (Māui, n.d.). Hutoitōi suggested it is “the tale of daylight savings time” (in interview, 2012). Another narrative can be seen in the stained glass window/door designed by artist Robert Janke the creation story<sup>9</sup> is depicted (Fig. 5.2.5). When the door is *raised* it reenacts the creation by separating the parents, Ranginui and Papatuanuku, and



symbolically giving light to darkness. The array of colors used in the stained glass and within the marae can be associated with one of their sons, Whiro, who erected a rainbow (Winitana, 2001/10). Therefore, the marae and its whare can be considered as an extension of whakapapa as an expression of the relatedness of all living things (Smith, 2011).

There are three entrances to the marae, two are ceremonial gateways or Waharoas and one is the public's entrance from the exhibition area. The external gateway (Fig. 5.2.5.), *Te Ara a Tāne*, is the pathway of men, whereas the internal gateway, *Te ara a Hine* is the pathway of women. The external contemporary gateway honors the various people who have settled in New Zealand. From the marae's atea (outside area), the Waharoa, designed by Māori artists Luke Matthews and Oransay Smith, over looks Wellington harbor. The women's pathway also serves as a changing space for exhibitions of women's art (Te Papa website, 2015).

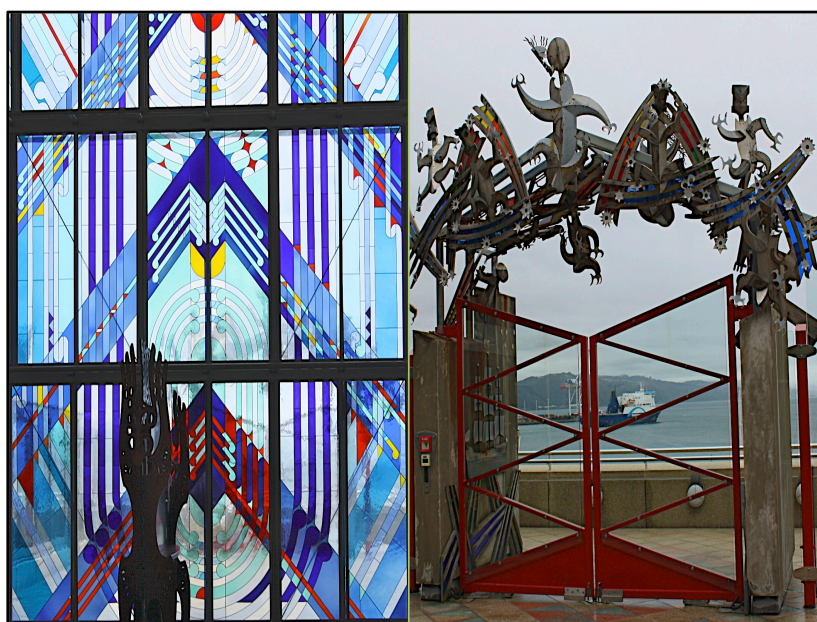


Figure 5.2.5. Left image is the stained glass door and the right is the Wahaora overlooking the harbor. Images used with permission of The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, photo 2012.

Traditionally, the local iwi has proprietary authority over the land and the local customs and knowledge making each marae unique. Without such an attachment the marae becomes something of a non-space (Williams, 2005). However, Te Papa developed the marae as a *shared space* for both Māori and Pākehā, which does not follow propriety authority. Normal protocol associated with a marae suggests

visitors have to be invited into the space and can enter only after participating in a traditional tapu (spiritual) carving process, and shoes would be removed before entering; something that is not done here. Williams (2005) seems to question the cultural authenticity of the marae in such a setting with the allowances made to allowing the general public enter what would otherwise be a space of spiritual significance. However, Hutoitoi commented the marae serves a tribal complex, but there are “subtle” nods to the local iwis in some of the artwork within it (in interview, 2012). Williams’ concern may be justified. He states Westerners entering the space would share the traditional knowledge of Māori, but it would “take a leap of faith” for some to accept the Māori belief that ancestral spirits inhabit carved objects and natural phenomena, such as a meetinghouse” (Williams, 2005, p. 86). Part of that “leap of faith” may be in the fact that the museum “removed the labels” (Hutoitoi in interview, 2012); therefore, there is little cultural information on the meanings behind the artwork and creates a space that leans towards being more of a Māori domain than a bicultural one.

The space is used for meetings, ceremonies, and other relationships associated with iwi relationship strategy developed by the museum. McCarthy (2011) refers to research by Cath Nesu that seems to coincide with William’s concern, she stated, “The marae is seen as a Māori context where the Māori language and protocol comes first and the Māori voice can take precedence in dealings with iwi over taonga” (p.143).

## **5.2.4 THE CURATOR AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4)**

Māori communities are part of the planning, implementation, opening and closing, and educational aspects of the exhibit along with the Māori curators (Hutoitoi in follow-up questions, 2015). The process of consultation and collaboration involves finding “the right people to contact”. The right people are “those recognized by their communities as their representatives . . . the aim is to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships of trust”(Hutoitoi in follow-up questions, 2015).

Considerations for exhibition come from drawing on the collection’s strengths. The curator, Hutoitoi, conveyed while the collection contained taonga with famous ancestral lineages and known tribal histories, it also holds many beautiful taonga that have a high value for display but have little or no known ancestral or tribal history. Knowledge connections have been lost over time, often due to how the object has been appropriated by the collector who may have had little historical interest in recording the original history.

This creates different levels of community liaison and involvement with the curators on deciding what is exhibited and how much is known about it (Hutoitoi, in follow-up questions, 2015). An example of this is the former iwi exhibit *Tai Timu Tai Pari Tainui*. A two-part video on You-Tube (wakahuiaTVnz, 2011)

presents Tainui tribal members discussing the taonga presented in the exhibit and provides further insight into the ancestral lineages of the objects found in the exhibit. Various tribal members discuss lineage for some taonga that go back to the ancestors arrival in Aotearoa, their connection to the land, Māori legends, and the power the taonga still held. Everything presented in the exhibit had a personal narrative attached to it that had been passed down through each generation.

When asked if the demographic make up of the curatorial team made a difference in how narratives were presented, Hutoitoti replied “yes” (in interview, 2012). As a reminder the curatorial team for Māori exhibitions is entirely Māori who “privilege Mātauranga Māori understandings” in their work. In other words, their work “reinforces and reflects Māori world views and Indigenous philosophies” while also “drawing on findings of scientific inquiry” (Hutoitoti, follow-up questions, 2015). Accordingly, Māori communities “may be reluctant to collaborate with non-Māori on projects that so closely work with their cultural identity—the concept of *tinorangatiratnaga*, or Māori self-determination comes into play” (Hutoitoti, in follow-up, 2015). Due to this, most of the larger museums in New Zealand have Māori curatorial staff.

In correspondence following the questionnaire, Hutoitoti elaborated on the idea of non-Indigenous curators developing knowledge to be ‘Indigenous curators’ by stating that they, “can acquire it given time, commitment and the right approach, but it’s not the same”. Based on McCarthy’s (2011) research at Te Papa, Pākehā staff had moments of “tension and confusion” but also “learning, exchange, and genuine personal growth” and taking part in the cultural experiences made a “profound impact” on personal views and the context of being a New Zealander (p. 83). Although the staff members were not attempting to be Indigenous curators, their comments allude to some of the challenges involved.

The Māori curators through *whakapapa* (genealogical connections) collectively are able “to gain insider access to a number of tribal networks”, and are “continually extended through ongoing museum work, assisted by a dedicated Māori liaison team, Nga Manu Atarau, and by other personal interactions within the Māori community”(Hutoitoti, follow-up questionnaire, 2015). This underpinning allows for effective work with the Māori communities.

### 5.2.5 SUMMARY

The focus of this case study was on the curators involved with the Māori galleries to better understand how he or she develops the meaning making process in representing the nation’s Indigenous people. Biculturalism emerged as a central theme integrating the museum’s organizational culture that includes Māori specific concepts such as Mātauranga Māori. I suggest that biculturalism may not be obvious to international guests upon entering the museum, but it is integrated in the



architects' conceptual design of the building, the incorporation of policies such as, Mātauranga Māori and mana taonga and its influence on the museum's partnership with Māori iwis in developing exhibitions, and the Māori curatorial team.

Huotitoi pointed out the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi positions biculturalism within the international context of Indigenous rights who confirmed, that the treaty along with ICOM, Indigenous Rights Declarations, and the museum's mission provided important guidelines. The terminology used in Te Papa's Annual Report (2014-15) promotes "connecting with people," "sharing authority," and "being a forum;" all were important factors mentioned by Hutoitoi at various times in the interview (2012) and the follow-up questionnaire (2015).

Pākehā and Māori have different systems of knowledge. Māori knowledge system encompasses spiritual knowledge held by specific people. Mātauranga Māori enables the museum to involve iwi and that in turn generates authentic exhibitions on Māori culture and history. The exhibition area of *Mana Whenua* created an environment for Māori culture and history to be told from the point of view of how the history of the past has affected the present. To borrow a term from National Museum of the American Indian, it provides narratives of survivance. Seen in the depiction of the Tainui's Creation story where an animated exhibit depicts an elder passing on the story to a small child, to the traditional knowledge of ancestors are presented in the images and narratives presented in the artwork of the contemporary Marae, and in the carving of the traditional *whenua*. Thus, Māori values are being passed down in both a modern and traditional context that relate to modern day Māori (and New Zealand) life. The Māori exhibition's location on the harbor side of the museum reflects the Māori's significance of connection land and sea.

This case suggests a salient theme of Te Papa's biculturalism policies influence not only the curator's representation of Indigenous peoples, but also social economy through the empowering of the various peoples of New Zealand, specifically the peoples of the various Māori iwis.

## ENDNOTES:

1. Cliff Whiting (tribal) one of New Zealand well-known Māori artists who was also served as a member of Te Papa as Kaihautu.
2. Conal McCarthy is a noted museum and heritage scholar who is the Director of the Museum and Heritage Studies program at Victoria University, Wellington, NZ. Formally, he worked at the National Museum in Wellington in the 1980s and has written extensible on Māori and museums. I had the pleasure of meeting with and talking to him at a museum and cultural heritage conference in Gothenburg Sweden early in this project. His books were strongly suggested to me by the Māori curators at Te Papa.

3. YouTube link: with Cliff Whiting and Dame Cheryll Sotheraon. Note the link may not be available as it is dependent on location rights now. It was still accessible in December 2015. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSu\\_PWlju4s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSu_PWlju4s)
4. There were similar videos found earlier that conveyed the same sort of difficulties and frustrations between Pakeha and Maori members in the initial planning of Te Papa, those videos are no longer online.
5. 'Hutoitoi' (ancestor) is the anonymous name chosen by the Māori curator interviewed. Out of respect, I have not placed tribal affiliations after the name in order not to provide any means of identification of the person.
6. My aim was to describe the iwi exhibit; however due to the time it took to get photographs approved not by the museum but by the iwi itself it was not possible. At this writing, I have not had a reply, making it more than a ten-month process. Additionally, the portion written on the exhibit would need to be approved by the iwi. Based on the time it was taken for approval of the images, I decided to write about the marae as my images of it had already been approved. I fully respect that such a process needs to take place; I am only critical of the timeframe involved.
7. Rākau Momori (dendroglyphs) are carvings on living trees that represent *karapuna* (ancestors) in afterlife. Kōpi groves are important places of spirituality in Moriori culture linking past, present and future. They are places of connection with ancestors and areas of contemplation. Moriori lived on Rekohu (Chatham Islands) for 900-1000 years. Rock art images reflect stylized birds, more typically found in rock art in Rapa Nui and Hawaii. There are 33 known rock art sites located in limestone caves on the western side ear Te Wharaga Lagoon. In 1791 there were 2500 Moriori living in the Islands, which lie 800 km to the east of New Zealand. By 1900 only 12 full-blooded Moriori survived. The Hokotehi Trust redresses injustices, works to revive language and cultural values. For more info: Millerstrom, S. (2008). What is New in Polynesian Rock Art Research? in Bahn, P., Franklin, N.R., & Strecker, M. (Eds.) *Rock Art Studies- News of the World*, Vol. 3. (213-225) Oxford: Oxbow Books.  
<http://www.moriiori.co.nz/home/>
8. Pounamu or greenstone (New Zealand jade) is found in boulders of the South Island's waterways. It is treasured and valuable mineral, which holds spiritual significance. The Ngāi Tahu iwi is its guardian but all iwis highly value it. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/pounamu-jade-or-greenstone/page-1>
9. The creation narrative varies between *iwis* but the common theme consists of "Papatūānuku, the earth mother, and Ranginui, the sky father, are the primal parents from whom all deities and life forms descend. Papatūānuku and Ranginui lived in the light, but they clung together in a tight embrace, while the children born to them lived in darkness due to the parents close embrace". Some of the children became restless and wanted to break away from the darkness. They tried to separate from their parents but were unable. "Eventually, Tāne (one of the children) placed his head and hands against Papa and his feet against Rangi and stretched himself out to force them apart" (Smith, 2011, p. 49). Papatūānuku and Ranginui had seventy-seven sons, but only seven became leaders: Whiro was the one who "kept balance and attested all decisions" and "out of his love for his parents created erected a rainbow that would be a bridge between the land and the sky and back again" (Winitana, 2010, p. 23).

### 5.3. CASE STUDY: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA (NMA)

*This is the land of Dreamings, a land of wide horizons and secret places.  
The first people, our ancestors, created this country in the culture that  
binds us to it.*  
- Hetti Perkins<sup>1</sup>

The history of Australia did not begin in 1788 with the arrival of Europeans. The nation's history began with the Dreaming<sup>2</sup> a time in the distant past when the creation ancestors appeared in Australia and began their journeys across the land some 40 to 60,000 years ago. During the late 1780s, it is believed that there were 250,000 Australians Aboriginals in the area now known today as New South Wales and nationally a total of one million across the country: by 1990 the Indigenous population in NSW had dropped by an estimated 90% and today there are approximately 470,000 Indigenous Australians across the country (Pearlman, 2011). In 1869, the Aboriginals Protection Act began to establish Aboriginal Protection Boards that began a process of westernizing Aboriginal peoples by removing them from their land, culture, language, and spiritual values (Smith, 2012).

It was the Dreaming ancestors who “held the first ceremonies, sang the first songs and created the designs that have continued into the living present” (Issacs, 1984, p. 10). For traditional Australian Aboriginals, the arts provide a societal core that connects their religious and secular life (Issacs, 1984/2007). The landscape and connection to their ancestral past provides a strong relationship with their art, and with each passing generation the traditions have continued, including the art of storytelling (Rose, 2000; Bruno, 2002). The topic of the value and importance of cultural heritage to Aboriginal peoples was addressed by, Chrissy Grant, a Kuku Yalanji and Mualgal woman who has been involved in cultural and world heritage at national and international levels. In an interview with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, n.d.) she stated:

*If you are looking across the landscape and there is a particular heritage site or place in the landscape, that's a tangible thing. But associated with that site might be stories, song, dance, and they are all part of our Australian Indigenous cultural heritage. If there were two sites in the landscape and there was a songline that went from one side to the other, and that was disrupted in some way with a gas pipe line or some other development, our cultural heritage values is most likely damaged or destroyed or even destructed. Even though it's an intangible thing - you can't see that songline, it is an important part of the Indigenous heritage values across the landscape. I know that's the case*

*for other Indigenous peoples around the world as well. I know the Latin Americans feel the same, the Africans, and other Indigenous peoples around the globe who also do not separate their tangible and intangible cultural heritage. That is a real challenge nationally and internationally where Indigenous peoples have a different view of their cultural heritage being holistic rather than tangible and intangible (n.d., para. 12).*

It is worth taking to heart Ms. Grant's last statement; Indigenous peoples see cultural heritage and landscape as more holistic—not just *tangible or intangible* but encompassing both. This has implications for how curators represent the narratives of Indigenous peoples. Few would have knowledge of the stories, histories, and spiritual *connection* to the land as Ms. Grant describes.

The National Museum of Australia, located in Canberra, Australian Capitol Territory (ACT) lies southwest of Sydney and northeast from Melbourne. In 1908, as a compromise between the two larger cities, Canberra was chosen as the site for the nation's capitol. American architect, Walter Burley Griffin designed Canberra as a planned city much like Paris and Washington, D.C. His design centered on an axis that aligns the central area with important areas of green space (Reed, 2002). The majority of buildings in Canberra are lo-rise and beige, which contrasts with the colorful modern architecture of the museum (Reed, 2002). The museum presents five themes in the permanent exhibitions: *Landmarks*, on people, places and their history; *Eternity*, peoples stories and connection to personal histories; *Old New Land*, on the nations environmental history; *Journey's*, Australia's connection to the world, which includes migrant stories; and the focus of this case study the *First Australians*, the largest gallery in the museum. The first four galleries also include a significant amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders history (curator in interview, 2012), but are not include in this research.

Canberra has been the home to the Ngunnawal people<sup>3</sup> for over 21,000 years with evidence of their occupation found at the Birrigai Rock Shelter at Tidbella Nature Reserve and in rock paintings at the Namadgi National Park (Namadgi National Park.au.gov). European settlement disrupted their patterns of land use and movement across the country causing many Aboriginals to die from disease brought with the Europeans. Although their numbers were greatly reduced and their culture and language in decline many continued to live in the area working on sheep properties. It is believed that Canberra is based on the Aboriginal name "Kamberra" or "Kambery" and it was not until 1913 when the name became official, and it wasn't until 1989 that the ACT became a self-governing territory (Canberra, 2015).

### 5.3.1 ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN (L1)

The complex abstract angles and vivid colors of the museum's architecture is the first impression visitors have of the museum. The basic concept for the museum building was established in the Pigott Inquiry of 1975 long before the architects or museum practitioners were involved. The Inquiry committee was firmly against having the "granite or marble facings of a prestige institution"; there should be a space in which "enjoyment and excitement could come easily. . .the building should show flexibility of use, with interior walls so that display galleries can be changed as necessary" (Pigott, 1975, p.79). Energetic and playful was what the architects delivered (Stead, 2004). Red, orange, black, bronze, gold, and brushed silver comprise the "vibrant palette" of colors that greet visitors to the National Museum of Australia (NMA 'Building' website 2015). The red and black of the exterior represent the Aboriginal flag (McKendry, 2013).

The museum's design follows Burley Griffin's city design by moving from two axis (land and water) to taking the straight lines of the city into a third axis that is "stretched and twisted, and curled" (McKendry, 2013, p15). The third axis created via the prominent red-orange looping ribbon, symbolizing the Uluru line, cuts through the building while simultaneously connecting the Parliament triangle and the country's geographical center in Uluru, formally known as Ayers Rock. The Uluru loop is not unlike a "roller coaster" swooping 30 meters high over the entrance to symbolize the rainbow serpent from Australian Aboriginal Dreaming stories (McKendry, 2013, p.15). According to one of the designers, the loop, provides a "spiritual kinship and the Parliament House can signify the dream of a democratic modernity" (Weller, 2002, p.130-131). The loop also provides a sense of entertainment that was considered a needed design concept to compete with other museums, bring in a younger audience, and create a balance of fun and learning (Sully, 2010). The idea of edutainment is incorporated in the complexity of the building's design, which "was meant to puzzle the viewer, indeed pose the question of Australian identity as a puzzle" (Jenks, 2002, p. 61). However, the concept of 'museum as entertainment attraction' and 'museum as exhibit' raises questions of how the museum engages with history (Message & Healy, 2004):

*The Museum itself is an exhibit, an attraction . . .our sense is that these strategies have left the NMA as a cultural institution in a difficult and complex space, an in-between space. The NMA has positioned itself as a new institution in part thorough its engagement with diverse fields . . . . At the same time it has effused to claim the traditional authority of (national) museums as being able to represent, and speak authoritatively about those political and cultural fields, The Museum can run the risk of being unable to defend the ground compelled to engage in the cultural wars (para.12).*



*Figure 5.3.1 Entrance to NMA: the red line continues through the column to the main entrance. Image used with the kind permission of National Museum Australia, photo 2012.*

The architects provide a different insight into the design. Ashton Raggatt McDougall (ARM) in collaboration with Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan designed the building based on a brief stating the architecture should “express Australia’s cultural diversity and reflect societies continual questioning, exploring and reinventing itself” (McKendry, 2013, p. 13). ARM’s architectural style is inspired by the work of Frank Gehry (Bilbao’s Guggenheim Art Museum) and Daniel Libeskind (The Jewish Museum in Berlin)—design styles thought by many to be “populist” (Stead, 2004) and “architectural exhibitionism” (Sudjic, 2002, p. 113). The museum’s Chief design architect, Howard Raggatt, perceives architecture: as a “canvas for political action” (Reed, 2002, p. 13). The architects describe their intent as (Dynamic Architecture, n.d.): “We like to think that the story of Australia was not one, but many tangled together. Not an authorized version, but a puzzling confluence; not merely the resolution of differences, but its wholehearted embrace.” Australian Aboriginal Dawn Casey (2002), the first Director of NMA (1999-2003)<sup>4</sup> seemed to concur suggesting the museum’s architecture uses “metaphor, symbols, and cultural references to create dialogue between the building and the subjects presented” (p.21). Consequently, before setting foot inside, the building takes on an aura of the “complex meaning of culture such as that of Australia” (Sudjic, 2002, p. 120).

The Garden of Australian Dreams extends the idea of edutainment and the use of abstract metaphors used in the buildings design. Although I did not have time to

move through it, I also did not feel it was somewhere welcoming as ‘garden’ there was native plants to shade you from the Australian sun, instead it presents a large colorful graphical map of Australia where visitors can “walk and read complex layers of the nation’s history”(Weller, 2002, p. 132). The gardens link the main building of the national museum and the Gallery of the First Australians. Weller, one the of ‘architects’ of the garden states they thought of the space as a “theatrical weaving of both the ‘Great Australian Dream’ and Aboriginal ‘Dreaming’ . . . both are landscape-based mythologies concerned with designing boundaries and kinship” (p. 132). Various maps were used to form the surface of the Garden including geological, electoral boundaries, road maps and historical structures such as the Dingo fence which runs from South Australian coast to the Queensland coast making it the “worlds longest structure” (Weller, 133). The designers have also incorporated the word ‘home’ in the many languages spoken in Australia. The overall design is as complex as the notion of the Boolean string is for the actual building. During my visit, a number of families were walking around the garden and enjoying its water features. Although it is outside the scope of this thesis, the ‘Garden’ would make an interesting social semiotic study, as would the nuances of the building.

### 5.3.1.2 Design of Exhibition Space

“Great light and open space with curving walls, windows and ceilings”, this is how the NMA website describes its entry hall (Fig. 5.3.2). The interior space depicts the inside view of a huge knot;<sup>5</sup> it becomes a metaphor for “the strands that tie Australians together as a nation, the weaving together of lives and stories of Australia and Australians”(NMA website, 2015). The design of the museum actively works against a single circulation route, as visitors are able to enter or leave an exhibition space from different points disrupting any predetermined flow (Cvoro, 2006). The exception is in the *First Australians* Gallery where the way you enter is also the only way to exit (the curators in interview 2012). The placement of the First Australians galleries at the end of the museum has not gone unnoticed. Initially, early plans had the gallery located close to the entrance in order to present a chronological presentation of the nations history, but in the end it was decided that it would be politically incorrect. One of the curators spoke of this decision suggesting that despite “huge arguments” they (the curators) should have “fought harder to have it in the front”(curator in interview, 2012). Research has shown that visitors tend to have a short attention span and rarely move through the entire museum (Falk and Dierking, 2000). This finding was further verified when I asked the curators how many people make it all the way to the *First Australians* galleries, “they get visitor fatigue, you don’t get all the people who come in, they have turned around and gone back” (curator in interview, 2012). This coincides with my own observations while I was there during peak hours between noon and four.



*Figure 5. 3. 2 Interior of Main Entrance showing information desk, café in background. Image used with the permission of National Museum of Australia, photo 2012.*

The museum's website states the colors chosen for the exhibition space were "for the exhibition designers, colour was central to communicating stories about Australia" (NMA, 2015), and personal observations recall walking is being difficult walking through the two levels of the ATSI gallery not to notice the vivid orange, golden yellow, and red walls. This suggested a reference to the colors found in the Australian outback and as an extension of the building's façade. During the interview, I asked if the curators took part in deciding what colors were chosen and was told there had been a "ten year moratorium on making changes to the interior colors by the architects", and that the orange was chosen by them the previous year. The same curator stated the some of the colors "really suck the life out of the exhibit, . . . they are dated." The curator continued suggesting the "strong design sense" of the exhibition space was "difficult" to work with and is something the team is still "coming to terms" with. The building was completed *without* the consultation of curators, which compounded planning of exhibitions (Hansen, 2005, p. 90.6).

The architecture and exhibition space make it difficult to know at once how the museum wants to frame the Australian story (Hansen, 2005). Both the Piggott Inquiry (1975) and the 'Review' (Carroll, 2003) provide some insight into the culture wars and how various forms of governing documents' effect decisions made in the implementation and design of the exhibit areas.



### 5.3.2. GOVERNING BODY AND DOCUMENTS (L2)

Much has been written about how pluralism is defined at NMA (*cf.*, McCarthy, 2004; Message and Healy, 2004; Hansen, 2005; Chynoweth, 2012, 2014). The museum opened in the spring of 2001, but the planning of began in the mid-1970s with what is known as the *Pigott Inquiry*, followed up with the *National Museum of Australia Act in 1980*, and then the *Review National Museum of Australia: Exhibitions and Programs* (Carroll, 2003) several years later. This section provides a brief overview on how each documents and the museums mission statement express multiculturalism.

#### 5.3.2.1. The Pigott Inquiry (1975)

The concept of the National Museum of Australia was derived in the Museums in Australia 1975 Report of Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, better known as the Pigott Report after the Chairman of the committee, Peter H. Pigott. The report states the establishment of a national museum would be for the “collecting, preserving, study and display of materials related to the history of man in Australia and the interaction between man and the Australian environment”. Additionally, the inquiry urged: “The museum, where appropriate, should display controversial issues, in our view, too many museums concentrate on certainty and dogma, thereby forsaking the function of stimulating doubt and thoughtful discussion” (Pigott, 1975, p. 4). The Inquiry states that a new national museum would provide a chance to:

*. . . mend several intellectual rifts which still affect those major museums founded in the nineteenth century . . . that tended to divorce Aboriginal man from European man and to divorce European man from nature. The Achievement of Aboriginal society over 40,000 years were minimized; and the subtle inter-dependence of European man and Nature was also minimized. Accordingly, many of the factors which moulded human history of both black and white settlers were neglected (p. 71).*

The inquiry suggested the museum would have:

*. . . three themes or sections, each linked intellectually and physically to the other at appropriate points. We believe that one theme should embrace the environment—land and sea, geology, flora, fauna and climates. Another theme or section should cover Aboriginal history stretching over some 40,00 years. A third theme should cover the history of Europeans in Australia. . . . The argument for a major display of*

*Aboriginal history is overwhelming. The chronology of the human occupation on Australia is dominated by Aboriginals. If the human history of Australia were to be marked on a 12-hour clock, the era of the white man would run for only the last three or four minutes (p. 71).*

These themes would later be challenged as being selected to the context of the 1970s; however in the 1980s and 1990s they were contested (Davison, 2003). The Inquiry was tabled in Parliament, where the recommendation for a national museum was taken up. In the end, much of what the committee suggested came to fruition in the architects' design and the vision of the Museum's executive management.

### **5.3.2.2 National Museum of Australia Act (1980)**

In April of 1980, the Hon. Robert Ellicott presented the Museum of Australia Bill to Parliament where the themes suggested in the Pigott inquiry were placed in the context that they would be "inter-related and complement each other" (Bolton, 2003, p.2). He stated that the history of Aboriginal man would be encompassed in the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia (Bolten, 2003):

*. . . to indicate that a history of Australia would be meaningless or misleading if it did not highlight the history and culture of the original inhabitants of this continent . . . The Museum of Australia will not give mere token recognition to Aboriginal history and culture. Nor will it portray that history and culture in a way considered suitable by Europeans . . . In effect Aboriginal people are invited to explain to the world their history and the richness of their culture (p.2.).*

The Bill was passed into law with bipartisan support in 8 September 1980. The act established the museum as a Commonwealth statutory authority and in combination with the *National Museum of Australia Regulations 2000*, defines the overall role, functions and powers of the museum (NMA Annual Report 2013-14, p. 46).

### **5.3.2.3 Organization of NMA**

The *Public Service Act 1999* covers the powers of the Museum Director in relation to Human Resources. The Council of the NMA is responsible for the overall performance of the organization, "including setting the strategic direction and establishing goals for management. The council works with executive management in developing, executing, monitoring and adjusting appropriate strategies" (NMA Annual Report 2013-14, p. 46). The Annual Report (2013-14) refers to seven appointed council members; only one is an Australian Aboriginal, a Yawuru man from Broome, Western Australia (p. 49). In 2015 the Museum's council approved the Indigenous Cultural Rights and Engagement Policy (POL-C-054), that provides

a guide for the museum's work with Indigenous peoples and their cultural heritage. Additionally, the Museum Indigenous Network (MINmin) program was developed in 2013 as a place for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, including volunteers, to get together for various activities.

### 5.3.2.4 The "Review" or Carroll Report (2003)

Dawn Casey, the museum's first director, had the vision of a museum that would encourage national conversation, or create the museum as civic forum, instead of a more traditional or popular historical presentations of the nations history from colony to nation (Hansen, 2005). In Australia, as in other countries, the "traditional text book of Australian history has often been presented as a successful transition from colonial society into a modern social democracy" (Hansen, 2005, p. 90.3). Despite attempts by Casey and the museum staff to stimulate national debate, it ended up that the exhibitions prompted too much provocation; something the Howard government felt the need to rectify. Even before the museum opened one of its board members, John Barnett (appointed by PM Howard) criticized the displays and instigated a review that stated the NMA exhibits favored "Indigenous activists" (Bonnell and Crotty, 2008, p.); this was refuted by Graeme Davison upon review of the report. However, the museum remained under conservative attacks (Bonnell and Crotty, 2008).

In response to further criticism after NMA opened, the Hon. Tony Staley AO, museum council chairman (circa 2001-2008), retired Liberal Party Member of Parliament, *and* a confidant of Prime Minister (PM) Howard, designated a review of the museum. John Carroll, a supporter of Howard, was appointed as the head of the review committee; thus, *The National Museum of Australia Exhibition and Programs Review* became known as the 'Carroll Report'. Again, most of the complaints lodged against the museum to be unsupported, verifying rumors that the review was set up merely to realign the museum with the ideology of then PM Howard, an idea refuted by Staley (Hendersen, 2003). The Review's goals were twofold; (1) to find out if the NMA had met the expectations put forth in the Act, and (2) expand on the vision of the museums exhibitions and programs, and make recommendations for further development (Carroll, 2003). *The Review's* introduction emphasized the need to "treat the museum as a work in progress" (p.2). Beside the four-member committee (*none* were Aboriginal), there was a request for submissions (105 submitted) and forty interviews of stakeholders. The completed review was presented to the museum's council.

The Review looked favorably at the *First Australians* galleries: the upper gallery was: "conceptually forceful and coherent indicating a firm curatorial hand . . . it is lit in cheerfully bright and warm colors. . . modules are uplifting to visitors spirits, and conducive to study and reflection" (Carroll, 2003, p. 21). The lower gallery, "presented social political issues that formed contemporary Aboriginal Society"

(Carroll, 2003, p.21). Despite the positive review of the *First Australian* galleries, the review argued that the national museum's primary role was to tell "the Australian Story" presenting "primary themes and narratives of Australia *since the arrival of the British*, through the building of the nation to the country's place in the contemporary world" (Carroll, 2003, p. 13, italics added). This correlates with the current placement of the First Australian gallery being at the end of the museum. Graeme Davison, who made a submission suggested (Carroll, 2003):

*The museum might better begin with the assumption that the imagined community we call nation is by its very nature plural and influx. A national museum might play host to several interpretations of the national past, stirring patriotic as well as critical, educationally demanding as well as entertaining (p.8).*

Bain Attwood, a historian, suggested Aboriginal Australians and non-British Australians should have the right to celebrate their particular history as well (Hansen, 2005, p. 90.1). Carroll, as the Review panel's chair rejected this argument and went so far as to suggest Attwood's point of view reflected the position of an "extreme pluralist, holding that history is no more than a collage of different stories and interpretations"(Carroll, 2003, p. 293). Hansen (2005) rejects the vision of presenting a single Australian story, suggesting it may be "reassuring and non-threatening, but it does not reflect the best of contemporary museum practice and historical scholarship" (p. 90.8). Discussion and debate have been stimulated not just from *The Review* but also by additions of *History Australia* to the national education curriculum (Hansen, 2005). Based on this, the difficulty of knowing what is the 'national story' of Australians seems to be an ongoing debate for its museums and educational system.

The Howard government (1996-2007) expressed concern "with the way in which Australian history was represented to the public" at both the NMA and how it was taught to students in schools (Bonnell and Crotty, 2008, p. 160). Howard was concerned that children were not learning to have pride in their country's achievements. Vicki Grieves (2003) in an article written on the erroneous recall of Indigenous Tasmanian history by Keith Windschuttle (also involved with criticism of exhibits in NMA) made the following comments on history:

*History, by its very nature, is an ongoing discourse. The sources that inform us of our past have to be trawled over and over again, in the light of new understandings, and layer upon layer of interpretations developed over time. Deeper understandings of the complexities of our histories will enable us to chart an optimal future in this country. That is, a future free of the colonial yoke, informed by new understandings of*

*our humanity and the need for social justice, reflected by the intelligentsia and in popular culture (p. 198).*

Grievies is an Australian Aboriginal woman who has also written on Indigenous knowledge (2009). Her quote reflects the way historians have typically portrayed Indigenous peoples history, and reflects the further need of museums, especially national museum's to promote history that accurately represents all its peoples.

### **5.3.2.5 Mission Statement**

A museums mission statement provides insight into the guiding ideas of the museum, what it wants to convey, and its inclusivity. The NMAs mission statement was changed in the current Annual Report (2014-15). Both the recent statement and the previous statement are presented as a means for comparison.

***The Mission Statement*** (NMA Annual Report 2013-2014, p.9):

*To promote an understanding of Australia's history and an awareness of future possibilities by:*

*Developing, preserving and exhibiting a significant collection*

*Taking a leadership role in research and scholarship*

*Engaging and providing access for audiences nationally and internationally*

*Delivering innovative programs*

***The revised Mission Statement*** (NMA Annual Report 2014-15, p. 7)

*The Museum brings to life the rich and diverse stories of Australia through compelling objects, ideas and programs (p.7).*

In comparison with the mission statements of the museums in the other two case studies there is little in the revised statement that points to biculturalism or the inclusiveness of all Australian citizens.

### **5.3.3 THE CURATOR AS AN EXHIBITOR (L3)**

Dawn Casey (2001) perceived the museum as a forum for discovery and debate. Years later, she reflected on and re-emphasized her position (Casey, 2007):

*If people find material in our exhibitions which (sic) startles or disturbs them—and they should, if they are paying attention—it becomes something to take away and think over. Discuss, perhaps reject, perhaps even take on board as part of a broader perspective. Our debate here should be everybody's debate—it's about Australian history and identity, and that's a very useful debate to have right now, (p. 297).*

Casey understood the complexity of trying to distill the nation's story so that every Australian could be part of it (Casey, 2002). This was the challenge presented to the curators and exhibit planners. Storytelling involved both “celebrating the positive and reflecting on the negative aspects of the diverse Australian experiences” (Casey, 2002, p. 19). Casey's words provide a foray to examine the First Australians galleries, the stories told within, and the challenges faced by the curators in representing the narratives of the nations first peoples. In addition to what is presented in this case, the ‘Link-Up’ and ‘Off the Wall’ exhibits are described in Article Two, which presents narratives on the Stolen Generations and the art collection in ATSIC government offices respectively; while, the exhibit *Since Time Immemorial* on central Australian rock art is discussed in Article Three.

The *First Australian Galleries* are presented on two levels: the lower level providing a more “contemporary” and personal historical narratives of “conflict and the removal of children”, while the upper level provides more “culture than history” (curators in interview, 2012). The *First Australians* Gallery is entered on the upper level through the multimedia Welcome Hall, a long darkened area where dancing figures, music, and a starry sky (the constellation of the Seven Sisters related to creation stories and cosmology) greet the visitor (Fig. 5.3.5). As the visitor moves through it the pressure sensitive floor creates any movement with it into an interaction with the projected images causing a rippling vibration: a space the curator stated was great fun when a large group of school children go through. The hall leads to an ethnographic display of artifacts (i.e., stone tools, glass Kimberly points) along with history that acknowledges the traditional owners of the region, the Ngambri and Ngunnawal who have lived in Canberra area for thousands of years. The gallery then moves into the main area of the upper gallery.

The upper gallery provides “diversity and connectedness” between the various Aboriginal communities as seen in the container display exhibiting similarities and differences in the art form across the country (curator in interview, 2012). Other exhibits at that time provided insights into the Ernabella Arts Organization in the Western Desert region known for Aboriginal art (southeast of Alice Springs) with beautiful silk textiles and ceramics. The Toolyn Koortakay collection presents rare historic possum skin cloaks. In both exhibits the ‘artists’ provided textual and audio-recorded information; evidence of the collaboration between the curators and



Figure 5.3.3 *The Welcome Hall: a multimedia entrance to First Australians Galleries.*  
Image used with permission of NMA, photo 2012.

the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In each exhibit a prominent example is placed in the foreground creating a more salient theme and visual effect than seen in some of the other exhibits in the gallery. In the *Ernabella* exhibit the striking multi-colours textiles created salience as they were in direct opposition to the muted shades of objects elsewhere in the gallery.

A balcony at the end of the upper gallery allows an overview of the exhibits below and of the juxtaposed angles of the gallery's ceiling and walls (Fig.5.3.6). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders flags hang prominently from the ceiling of the lower level while a multiscreen multimedia presentation depicting their connection to land is presented in an alcove near the staircase. From the stairs landing visitors can move through the Focus gallery, a temporary exhibit area; the Australian Aboriginal gallery; or the Torres Strait Islander gallery. A large artwork of neon light spanned the entrance to the Torres Strait Islanders gallery, which provides a visually connection with the water area in Garden of Australian Dreams through narrow band of windows at floor level. The narratives on the lower level galleries are more personal or autobiographical. At the time of my visit the *Off the Walls* exhibit was presented in the Focus gallery (Article Two). An exhibit titled *Resistance* focused on three "people who made a contribution to Aboriginal life" (curator in interview, 2012). The three people featured "chose how they would like to be represented" and worked with the curators "on what aspects of their life they

would like to show” (curators in interview, 2012). An exhibit on the Stolen Generations (Article Two) was within the main area of the gallery, while at the other end of the gallery tucked away to one side was an ‘exhibit’ or audiovisual room titled, “I’m Sorry”.



*Figure 5.3.4 Juxtaposed walls of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Galleries, Image used with permission of NMA, photo 2012.*

The *I’m Sorry* exhibit provided people with a chance to watch Prime Minister Rudd’s speech of 13 February 2008. At the time of my visit, the room was full of rows of empty chairs with a large screen in the front. At the entrance a sign provided some information on the historic day, yet no images or press articles from the day were present. Additionally, there was no image of the ‘I’m sorry’ written in the sky over Sydney, and no timelines of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders history leading up to that day. There was also no mention of the Healing Foundation whom like Link-up provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, nor were there quotes from any segment of the Australian population on what the day personally meant to them. Empowerment was represented by rows of empty chairs and an empty screen.

Most of the stories provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are oral, passed down through generations; thus, they are and not documented with written words: often this has been problematic for some conservatives, especially right after the museum opened. The curators recalled this early period and that it was dealt



with by combining oral history with actual history, and that it this method was “eventually allowed” (curator in interview, 2012) Based on this, I asked a curator if there was much government or upper management constraints on what narratives were chosen to present, the reply was:

*From the government, not at all. Well, I would like to think there is a kind of formal and informal controls. As far as the formal controls, the government has no formal control. Well, not directly. The Museum has a council, run by the minister, but the council is a panel of independent group of experts in various fields. The council certainly has an influence on the overall direction the museum takes and the tone, but it is rare that they get involved around individual objects or individual stories. It might be they would say, we would like to have a gallery that talks about the history of places in Australia . . .but for a minister, for example, to be involved I haven't known that (in interview 2012).*

Hansen (2010) describes his time as senior curator of one the main exhibitions during the opening and the implications of a team structure, which changed the title of curator to as ‘content developers’ (p. 24-25). He claims, the focus for curators was on research and object identification for the exhibitions development not on working with designers to realize the shape and message of the exhibition: as a team of interpretive planners was hired to take on the role. Hansen (2010) concluded commenting:

*while curators remained at the centre of producing content for the NMA it is also clear that their creative control of the final product was mediated by both internal and external factors. . . .Final approval for the exhibitions content was provided by the Museum's council and Director (p. 30-31).*

The title of ‘curator’ is currently in use. During the interview, I asked one of the curators to describe how he or she defined the role of ‘curator’:

*I see my role as curator very much like, as a combination as an expert in some areas, but more as a facilitator or translator to bring peoples ideas, or their perspectives about history, or their experiences—not just indigenous—and translating it to a form so visitors can connect it to broader things. It is not, I certainly don't see my role like, I am the world's expert and you must listen, and what I say is absolutely correct.*

Both curators implied the their role was one of ‘facilitator or translator’ and emphasized that their goal was to provide positive versus victimized narratives as an excerpt from the transcribed interview provides:

**AJC:** *How did you get ATSI people to work with you?*

**Curator 1:** *We contacted them.*

**Curator 2:** *(At the same time as above) I think we contacted people. But occasionally you might say to someone, “Are you interested in being featured in here”? Some people will say not really, others would say I can give you that piece if it comes back to them. But, I think a lot of the work we have done, either, in two ways, possibly because we become aware of collections. . . or because we already have some sort of knowledge of connections with somebody that can lead us into something which may lead us into other things.*

**Curator 1:** *(pause) we try to create role models, not create but present role models . . . There is the capacity to have very negative history of aboriginal history, its all about victimization, victims, its about loss, its about lots of things. There are certainly aspects to the story; but it is also a story about resilience, about revitalization.*

As collections have been considered *modus operandi* for curators, the NMA’s limited collection (Hansen, 2005) does not seem to affect its curators. The curators stated in the interview they tend to work backwards and choose the story *before the objects*; suggesting the size of the collection does not limit the telling of the nation’s history as some have suggested. A follow-up questionnaire to the curators in the spring of 2015 provided additional insight into the planning of the exhibits. Only one of the two curators responded to the questionnaire as the other was involved with strategic planning for a major upcoming exhibition. The curator revealed exhibitions are formulated based on the people being represented, the audience, and the collections. This reinforces the other curator’s comments that their primary objective is to present the narrative of the source community, before objects are chosen to represent it. From the feedback in the questionnaire, important documents guiding the curator’s work included the museums mission statement, ICOM guidelines, and Indigenous Declarations.

### 5.3.4 THE CURATOR AND THE SOURCE COMMUNITY (L4)

How the curators’ work with source communities often parallels how the exhibitions are presented; therefore, some of what could have been presented here was placed in the above section. During the interview(s), while walking through an exhibit a curator commented that working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities allows them to feel that “we (*the museum*), as an

organization are open and inclusive” (in interview, 2012). As follow-up, I asked if the information they received from the communities created a need to correct previously held documentation an object. The response was “Yes, yes”. Later in the interview the same curator added:

*I think as a museum we are very conscious that museums do not have the best reputation in regards to what happen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands people. The more we can open it up, and I never say the museum owns the collection, I always say things like, we are caring for the collections now. I think subtle changes of direction make a big difference when you are talking to people.*

Furthermore, one curator spoke of considerations for a rethinking how the space could be better utilized and who should be involved in the process (in interview, 2012):

*The way we redesign the space will be very interesting to see how we incorporate, how we make sure that it is not just non-indigenous driving the whole thing . . . whether we do that through reference groups, or bring in more indigenous curators, which there aren't that many, will be interesting questions . . .*

This seems to suggest that there were a few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the curatorial team at the time I visited, although one curator suggested otherwise (in interview, 2012); the quote certainly suggests the curators realized the importance and value of including Indigenous peoples voices. In the follow-up questionnaire the curator was asked to comment if the demographics of the curatorial team made any difference in how and what was presented, the reply was “Of course it affects the result. Close community consultation assists in balancing the input”; however, when asked what was the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous curators, the reply came back, “In our section, nothing. All have the sound representation of the ATSI<sup>6</sup> people as a core function”. Whether a “sound representation” is represented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the curatorial staff or whether it implies it relates more to the close work done with Australian Indigenous communities is uncertain. Further responses in the follow-up indicated that the curators work with Aboriginal and Torres Islands Strait peoples throughout “all stages the process” and that their contact with the source communities are “face to face” with “regular visits, ongoing contact and negotiation, and visits to NMA” (follow-up questionnaire, 2015).

In addition to the work done by the curators a wide variety of different forms of outreach area also provided:

- The ATSIP online magazine, *The Goree news*, provides information on the galleries. The magazine is distributed to thousands of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school children, organizations, and communities across the country providing information about community involvement with exhibitions, behind the scene information, and visits to the museum by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders community members.
- *Collections online* seek information on objects: as a means of collecting information and involving communities in what is presented at the museum.
- Various cultural programs and lectures are presented to extend and promote the narratives presented in the exhibitions.

### 5.3.5 SUMMARY

Despite all the efforts of the staff and then Director, Dawn Casey, the opening of the National Museum of Australia is remembered more for criticism by conservatives than for its effort to create exhibits that were pluralist. Looking at recent media accounts, the shadow of events at the turn of the century seems to extend to today, much as if the museum is walking on egg shells and thinking about the degree of debate they can promote from the exhibits. NMAs telling of Australia's story is front and center, but due to the political aspects, the question still concerns whose version are being told. Several themes arise within this case: influences from its architecture/ design; terminology used describing the museums relationship with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as "consultants"; and how their voice is presented. There seemed to be a blurring of lines within the four layers (L1-L4), which influenced the role of the curators.

The postmodern architecture effects to some degree to how narratives told within the galleries are conveyed to the public. The gallery's location at the end of the building limits the amount of people who will travel the distance *after* going through the four other galleries; it also questions the value the nation places on Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples and their history be it past or present. The juxtaposed angles of the interior space and the dated colors that "suck the life out of the exhibits"(NMA curator in interview, 2012) add to the complexity of having coherence in the exhibitions' narrative. These architectural constraints were rarely or never discussed with the curators in the museum's design process (NMA in interview, 2012). Details such as this detract from how narratives are presented and understood by the public: drastically affecting not only the meaning making process but also challenging the public's idea of a pluralist country.

From the voices presented in the interviews, the follow-up questions, the website, and the annual report the term "consultant" is used to convey the relationship

between curators and the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities. In reading the Annual report of 2014-15, I had hoped to see a change in terminology, in staff demographics, and to see more Australian Indigenous people represented on the council, but none was found. The *Pigott Report* stated the *First Australians* gallery was to be told from an Indigenous Australians staff viewpoint, and *not as had been done in the past*, from the voice of white Australians. The information gathered in the interviews and follow-up questions suggest this is not entirely the case. The inference I had at the time of the interviews in 2012 was that no Indigenous Australian peoples were part of the actual curatorial team. Additionally, the annual report consistently shows less than 10 employees (or less than 4% of a staff that numbers on average 234) are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. This seems to suggest a lack of seeing the value of having their voice heard from within the museum except for a few, including the one member out of seven on the council who is of Aboriginal heritage. The letting go of Dawn Casey after her initial Directorship and the firing of Alicia Duff as head of the ATSIP both add to this quagmire of whose voices are being heard and who is hired for key positions. Whether politics plays a role in the low amount of Indigenous Australians people hired or not, I am not sure. Looking into the websites and annual reports of other museums in Australia things seem quite different as many have several Indigenous Australian people on board as curators. Despite having questions on hiring Indigenous Australian peoples for curatorial and other positions, the NMA current annual report (2014-2015) *does* point to extensive outreach programs, cultural programs and volunteers that promote increasing involvement for Indigenous Australian peoples.

When speaking with the curators there is no hiding their real sense of pride in the close relationships they have Indigenous Australian communities and the importance of presenting *the communities story* over their own: there was no attitude of superiority of ‘all knowing’ from the curators, it came down to telling the stories of the people. The comments made in the interviews and follow-up, the ‘consulting’ process seems to be an ongoing back and forth process between the curator and the Indigenous Australian peoples. The ATSIP curators input into the website provides substantial resources for Indigenous Australian communities that may never visit the museum but can learn about exhibits online, especially through the publication and distribution of the *Goree News*.

Narratives presented in the exhibitions recognize the individual stories of Indigenous Australian peoples through their voice, but the stories told are non-threatening. Missing are exhibits to provoke that make you ask more questions then you have answered. Whether this is due to national or museum politics, I am not sure, nor was it the intent of this research to take up that question. Two questions remain unanswered (1) If the Museum’s mission statement, annual report, and website doesn’t include wording that promotes more inclusivity, i.e., collaboration or partnership, then why would curators speak any differently; and (2) If consulting

changed to partnership how would it influence the dynamics between the curators and the ATSIC peoples and the narratives presented in the exhibits?

## ENDNOTES

1. Ms. Perkins is an art curator and writer and the eldest daughter of Australian Aboriginal activist Charlie Perkins. She is a member of the Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon Aboriginal. She was the Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Recently she curated the Australian Indigenous Art Commission at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. In 2014 she was Bangarra's Resident Curator and Creative Director for Corroboree Sydney (<http://bangarra.com.au/hetti-perkins>). <http://www.australianinspiration.com.au/Quotes/Australiana/IndigenousAustralians.aspx>.

2. Yarrlin people refer to "photos" of rock art ('images' in English) as the dreaming (Rose, 2000). Australians use the term 'Dreaming' to refer to a wide range of concepts and entities which are not covered by the same term in all their own languages. In Yarrlin, for example, "it refers to: the creative beings who were born of the earth and who walked first, creating geographical features, different species, and the Laws of existence; the creative acts of these beings; the period in which these things happen; and many of the relationships between humans and other species" (Rose, 2000, p. 44). Dreaming is a model for and a celebration of life as it is lived in the present. Dreaming can be understood as a particular kind of map that becomes a reference for the past, present and future. In Dreaming, most life forms had a basic human shape but they were able to change shape at will. Dreamings walked like people, bringing knowledge of tools, hunting, rituals, songs, and language (Rose, 2000, p.45). David Bruno (2002) adds that "there is no abstract space for the Dreaming, all space is the place of the Dreaming. It is a place that is always occupied, engaged, and examinable" (p. 30).

3. Refers to the architect's use of Boolean mathematics as related to geometry that include union, intersection, and subtraction. For more on the museum's use of this see *Tangled Destinies*, National Museum of Australia (Reed, 2002, pp.37, 40).

4. Dawn Casey was Director of NMA from 1999 to 2003, only one year after the museum opened despite rave reviews of the museum. She was fired by the Howard government and to this day the firing is still controversial as many in the museum sector and general public believed it was because she was a woman and an Aboriginal (IBA, para. 9). Despite this she received a Public Service Medal for "remarkable achievement" in outstanding public service (IBA, para.9). While director, she was able to keep the building of the museum on time and on budget- a rare achievement (iba.gov.au). According to Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), she enjoyed working at NMA where she was able "to share with millions of visitors including school children, the rich, complex ancient, sophisticated and enduring indigenous culture, together with the long struggle for recognition and the impact of the removal of children, with people who come through the museums; because museums are trusted organization and if you do it well, you change attitudes" (IBA, 2015, para. 8). As of 2009, she was the new chair of IBA. <http://www.iba.gov.au/article/meet-dr-dawn-casey-new-chair-iba/> In the same light, Alicia Duff, The head of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Program was fired in 2014. Duff, also an Aboriginal woman, accused the museum of double standards and alleged widespread racism within the senior curatorial staff at NMA, with one curator suggesting she was hired only because she was a young pretty black face that the museum needed to present to the media (cf. Michael, 2014). Thus, the debate of the culture wars continues.

5. The exhibit has been travelling to other museums in the country albeit with difficulty due to its content which presents the displacement of children (Australian and immigrant children, along with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children) to institutionalized

family homes by the government who believed they were better off there (cf. Chenoweth, 2012, 2014).

**6.**The acronym ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) is considered slang and offensive according to cultural language usage information at the following Australian Universities: Monash, Flinders, Queensland, and Queensland Technical University, along with the Australian Aboriginal website Creative Spirit.info. Appropriate terminology is Indigenous Australian people or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities (or peoples). In my opinion, I do not believe the curator intended to suggest a negative connotation in using the term.





## CHAPTER 6: TOYS, STOLEN GENERATIONS, & ROCK ART

The central context of this thesis is to better understand who or what influences a curators meaning making process in the representation of Indigenous peoples. Whose voice is represented and to what degree there is involvement has implications for the narratives told, the museum's initiatives of inclusivity, and presenting uncomfortable histories that have remained silent. Toys, the Stolen Generations, and Rock Art may seem to create an eclectic relationship for such research; however, they share more in common then might be expected. This chapter provides an overview of the research goals of each article before presenting the articles (6.2-6.4). To initiate the reader a brief overview of the relationship between the three articles and the larger thesis is offered.

The connecting themes between the three articles are meaning making, marginalization, multivocality, and tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Behind the themes lie several voices: the political innuendos of the museum, the relationship of the curator with the source community, and the exhibition space provided. All three articles implicitly question the museum's role to be mindful of and socially responsible for the narratives presented.

Toys as children's cultural heritage are investigated through a parallel case study of two Scandinavian toy museums. The findings present two distinctly different collections where the exhibitions present toys as part of an adult's *childhood*, not as play things with their own specific personal narratives. In both case studies' adults are the intended audiences. A contrast in exhibition styles relates to the source of the collections, and to the authenticity of historical accounting of what toys children *actually* would have played with at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century versus the bourgeois influence of the collection.

The Link-Up exhibit at the National Museum of Australia was one of two exhibits discussed in the second article. The exhibit provides several personal narratives from different people or groups involved with the Stolen Generations. One of the stories is told through an artwork created by a young Australian Aboriginal woman that tells the story of her mother's removal from home, separated from other family members and placed in an orphanage so she could better assimilate into the dominant white culture. This differs from the first article in the narratives for the exhibit comes directly from the young woman, her mother and grandmother—the curator's point of view are silenced—to a point. While the exhibit provides empowerment for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it lacks mention of the continued effects of the horrific past of Australian history: it

provides a softer voice that doesn't really challenge the nation's decision to displace so many children over such an extended period of time. Article One and Two both convey different forms of narratives presented based on the collection and the curators choice of represented narratives.

Rock art exhibits in museum have the opportunity to present more than just archaeological narratives. Within the context of Indigenous peoples galleries at national museums, the topic offers a diachronic history from the ancient past through to the present. As cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, it conveys social and cultural contexts that provide insight in to humankind's development but more importantly it continues to speak to and inform the Indigenous cultures who act as its guardians today. Rock art also provides a means of museums presenting environmental message related to its destruction from development of infrastructures (i.e., mining, gas plants, roads and rail systems), and deterioration from due to climate changes. The third article questions if political implications are why such narratives are missing, and how role of the source communities as curators could provide authentic social and cultural narratives connecting rock art as part of their cultural heritage.

All three articles suggest the semiotic landscape of the building and exhibit plays a valuable role and differs dependent on the voices involved in the curatorial process. What and how narratives are presented are dependent on the multivoices involved beginning with the museum values and Directors agenda, to who is curating and the degree of involvement of the source communities. Janes (2010), suggests museums as social institutions need to "mindful organizations" (p. 326) that share authority and place exhibit narratives within a framework that pushes the envelope to embrace and tackle the larger societal issues confronting the civilization. Intangible cultural heritage ties the three articles together with the main thesis. What the findings show is that while museums are becoming more inclusive the narratives they present still need to move forward in giving a greater and more authoritative voice to the people being represented. The notion of co-curation, community curation, or Indigenous curation moves the process beyond tangible to incorporate intangible realms about traditional knowledge and expands heritage protection into a broader social context.

Specific information regarding each article is presented. Following the three articles Chapter Seven provides a cross comparison discussion of the case studies that included findings from the articles.

## OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 1

**Title:** Toy Story: Childhood versus Children in Toy Museums.

**Authors:** Anne Jodon Cole, PhD fellow & Eva Petersson Brooks, Ph.D.

**Address (both):** Aalborg University, Esbjerg, Denmark. Centre for Design, Learning & Innovation, *Writing relationship:* (60/40%)

**Accepted:** Published: *museums and society*, 14(2) July 2016 pp. 294-312.

**Audience:** museum practioners

**Abstract:** Toys are considered children's cultural objects, yet when placed in a toy museum they become collection for adult viewing. This article uses Kress and van Leeuwens' concept of 'semiotic landscape' wherein the exhibit provides a specific context of communication that becomes a mediating device between adults and children. The question then becomes, how does a display of static toys speak to a child's culture of play? Through interviews with toy museum curators and personal observations, it was found that the exhibition was designed to have adults share and reflect stories about toys with children. Such activity reflects a representation of toys as collections for adults (childhood perspective) rather than the playthings of children (children's perspective). Material culture of children was implicitly represented through playful, sensory, and affective engagement.

**Key words:** *toy exhibits, material culture of children, semiotic landscape, play, narratives*

**Aim & Background:** The main purpose of this study was to better understand the curatorial considerations involved in exhibiting toys to determine if children's' perspectives are considered. The research was framed within different areas of research: Scandinavian approach to children, children as marginalized part of society, 'toys' as tangible and intangible heritage of children, and exhibit context as it relates to narrative and voice.

**Method:** Two case studies of toy museums in Scandinavia were carried out. We had semi-formal interviews with the primary curator from each museum. Each interview lasted approximately one to two hours as we walked through the exhibit, and photographs were taken of the exhibits after the interviews. The interviews were transcribed and together with related research provided the format for contextual analysis, which combined with theoretical considerations of *semiotic landscape* to answer our questions.

**Findings & Conclusion:** We found two distinct landscapes: one historical and one a hodge-podge of various collectors collections. The curator's personal, social, and institutional considerations grounded the exhibits and resulted indifferent strategies to display toys as children's cultural objects.



## TOY STORY: CHILDREN VERSUS CHILDHOOD IN TOY MUSEUMS

*When children pretend, they're using their imagination to move beyond the bounds of reality. A stick can be a magic wand. A sock can be a puppet. A small child can be a superhero.<sup>1</sup>*

– Fred Rogers, *American Children's program TV host 1928-2003*

### Introduction

Mister Rogers, aka Fred Rogers, an American TV host for young children's program (1960s-2001) had it right: There are no boundaries in children's play. A simple item such as a stick can become something magical when a child has the opportunity of creative play. As the stick transforms, through a bit of hocus pocus, into a magical wand, its meaning has shifted to one that holds significance for the child but not necessarily for an adult. Toys presented in toy museums seem to lose this magic by becoming static objects no longer capable of providing play. Toy museums are similar to other museums whose collections have been donated through estates or collectors with the sole purpose to preserve and present them to society. Museology research suggests children are marginalized in a world directed by the voice of adults where the ideas of the child are often silenced (*cf.* Townsend, 2012; Roberts 2006; Hirschfeld 2002).

Thus, if the perspective is on childhood and not children, a sense of the joy and playfulness is missing. Lawrence Hirschfeld reminds us, 'children live and maintain cultural environments of their own. It is an environment where cultural reproduction takes place according to the constraints of adults' (2002:615). This situation raises four points of exploration regarding toy museums: 1) Who is the intended audience; 2) Who is involved in the process of representation/presentation; 3) What social / historical narratives are presented, and 4) Whose voice is heard?

To answer these questions, we draw on two case studies of Scandinavian toy museums (*Den Gamle By*, Arhus, DK and *Leksaksmuseet*, Stockholm, SE) with the aims to analyze the representation of the material culture of childhood (toys) through analysis of the 'semiotic landscape' in parallel with semi-formal interviews of each curator: focus is placed on the signification *produced by curators* in relation to the toys, a contextualization that provides a social relation (Brougere, 2006).

The metaphor of semiotic landscape allows for the understanding of the societal impact on visual communication (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The term, taken from the theory of social semiotics, provides a means of: 'understanding the context of the range of modes in public communication within a specific society and, on the other hand, their uses and valuation' (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:35).

The landscape of each museum varies, just as a landscape in nature changes with the seasons, time, and light. To understand the context of a specific exhibit it is necessary to take into account the environment surrounding it, its history, its development, and the juxtaposition of the objects within the exhibit. A curator's choice of modes for representation become central issues, and answering these questions provides the opportunity to assess if or to what extent children's perspectives are considered within toy museums.

Based on this approach, our primary objective is to better understand the *curatorial* considerations involved in exhibiting toys to determine if children's perspectives are considered in the chosen method of representation. Based on our research interest the scope of the research does not include guests' interpretation or other child oriented museums (i.e., museums of childhood or children's museums), as it was designed as a small parallel PhD study. As academics in Denmark (one American, one Swede), our museum choices were selected in Scandinavia due to familiarity with them by the authors. In addition, due to favorable and progressive social policies towards children and childcare it is possible that a Scandinavian context offers a distinct perspective.

In order to answer our questions, several areas framed this research: Scandinavian approach to children; children as marginalized part of society; defining the term 'toy'; toys as tangible and intangible heritage of children; and context (narrative & voice) of toys in museum settings. The paper is divided into four sections: the introduction, relevant background, two case studies, and concluding comments.

### **Scandinavian child policy approach**

Scandinavia is known for its tradition of placing family policy as a top agenda. Scandinavia's welfare is based on equality, equity, children's health and children's education. Sweden and Denmark in particular are considered trendsetters towards their perspectives on children where modern legislation protects children as a minority group and does so on an individual term not as a collective: this is distinctly Scandinavian. Both countries have high literacy rates in part because of early childhood education promoting the value of play integrated with learning (Baumer, Ferholt, Lecusay 2005). In Scandinavia, early education places focus on the whole child and requires the school curricula integrate play with learning; therefore, children gain independence through the social aspects of preschool, where play and learning, or narrative learning (Hakkarainen 2004) are natural part of their daily lives (Pramling and Carlsson 2008). Thus, Scandinavian children are given the occasion to be seen and heard early in life (Sommer, Pramling, and Hundeide 2010). This is accomplished through preschool (starting as early as age one), where children learn to express thoughts, develop their own opinions, and accept responsibility for their own actions (Sommer, et al., 2010).

Sommer, Pramling, Carlsson, Hundeide, and Hakkarainen are some of the leaders of Scandinavia's early childhood pedagogy, suggesting that through the above method children learn to understand democratic principles by participating in decision-making where *their perspectives* are taken into account, such as school and home. The only methodology used involves interaction, communication and play. Sommer et al (2010) point out the difference between *child perspectives* and *children's perspectives*: the latter refers to those of the children themselves where the former refers to those from an adult's perspective. From this it would seem more likely that in Scandinavia toys might be exhibited from a children's perspective.

### **Marginalization of children**

Brian Shepard (1996) suggests, that, collectively, children are in their own cultural group that is often marginalized. He adds that children are seen as having no significance, unworthy, and are not seen as people with their own thoughts, ideas and opinions. History coincides with this and points to their difficult past, for example British colonial handling of Indigenous children, child trafficking and slavery, and under-age textile workers (Darien-Smith and Pascoe 2013). Because of this and their age, children are unable to stand up for their rights, for the preservation of their culture and are overlooked collectively as a cultural group even though that group would be broken into distinct factions (Shepard 1996; McRaney and Russick 2010). Regarding childhood and children's material culture, children's voices and perspectives should be taken into consideration (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002). Already some 30 years ago, research emphasized that children's perspectives were always a matter of adults' interpretation, a concern also found by more recent researchers (c.f. Bronfenbrenner 1979; Hirschfield 2002; Brougere 2008; Darien-Smith and Pascoe 2013). Issues on the marginalization of children provide a parallel to Indigenous communities where the Imperial mindset (the adult in this case) is believed to surpass that of the native (the child). Other parallels center on the heterogeneity of children's histories being different and not collective, the importance of the intangible aspects of their culture, such as oral history, and cultural heritage is 'closely aligned with history' (Darien-Smith and Pascoe 2013:3).

To create a distinction between what is considered the voice of the child versus that of the adult specific terminology is needed. Researchers (Brookshaw 2009; Darien-Smith and Pascoe 2013) corroborate this suggesting, the material culture of *children* relates to toys children create for themselves and/or adapt into their culture from an adult world, and a material culture of *childhood* relates only to toys designed and manufactured by adults for children. These definitions are in line with the above-mentioned Scandinavian pedagogics put forth by Sommer et al

(2010), which similarly emphasize the difference between *child perspectives* and *children's perspectives*. Children's perspectives and the material culture of children relate to both the tangible and intangible aspects of the object. Differentiating between the two terms not only provides specific domains for future research involving toys, learning, and socio-cultural understanding but also provides additional means of analysis for the semiotic landscapes within toy museums.

When different narratives of childhood and toys are missing it creates the appearance of elitism and legitimizes a certain form of social practice that excludes specific members of society—pluralism is non-existent (van Leeuwen 2005). Thus, attention needs to be given to what is *not* represented as much as what *is* represented in museum exhibitions (Marstine 2006); for a toy museum this suggests the need to consider *whose childhood* is represented.

Research shows that visual narratives provide an effective tool for meaning making, as it is through the activity of storytelling that people are able to share their understanding of something. Museums provide visual narratives (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). The placement of display cases and the objects inside frame such narratives and contribute to the linking of information and context (van Leeuwen, 2005). According to Tricia Austin (2012:107), narrativity of a space determines the degree 'storyness' and describes the narrative process as 'laid out as a sequence' (2012:115) where the author (curator or collector) develops the story and delivers it to the audience. Also, visual cues taken from individual exhibits *and* from the overall semiotic landscape (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), the scopic site (Hooper-Greenhill 2000), or overall physical dimension (Falk and Dierking 2000) of the museum create additional narratives. Thus, narratives are created through the placement of the chosen objects within the exhibit, the physical plan of the exhibit in relation to adjoining exhibits, and the various modes used within the exhibit. Through multimodal aspects of the museum, such as lighting, sound, and colors, specific narratives can provide additional means of creating or enhancing meaning, i.e., a bold color panel on one wall, a spotlight focused on a solitary object, the movement or sounds of objects—all draw attention to specific objects or areas of the exhibit creating salience.

Additionally, children are still rarely considered as *the* audience, despite new museology placing more focus on being more inclusive (Hirschfeld 2002; Sandell 2003; Roberts 2006; Townsend 2012; Darien-Smith and Pascoe 2013). Typically, children's significance in museum is through visitor studies and educational aspects versus their involvement in the how's and why's in the representation of their material culture. Children are rarely involved in the planning or actual curation process, yet to be more inclusive museums need to involve those whose culture is represented—children being no exception.



An example of how partnering with children can work was the *Shhhh! It's a Secret!* exhibit in 2010, where twelve young students (ages 9-11) developed and carried out an exhibition with the help of the curatorial staff at the Wallace Collection in central London (cf. Bryant 2011). Bryant proudly stated the exhibit was one of the museum's most successful to date, and that 'it was far more imaginative and subtle than the one the learning department would have developed' (Bryant 2011:398). This example seems to be outside the norm, thus a natural question follows: To what extent are children's perspectives included in (the creation of) toy museum exhibitions?

### **Toys as playthings and cultural heritage**

Toys are interesting cultural objects wherein children use them, yet they are primarily developed and manufactured by adults for children. So what is a toy? The answer to this question is dependent on the person who talks about the toy. *Oxford Advanced English Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> edition* defines a toy as: 1) an object for children to play with, 2) an object you have for enjoyment or pleasure rather than for a serious purpose (Hornby 2005:1625), which conveys a message for a toy as a means of entertainment and nothing more. From a social semiotic perspective, van Leeuwen and Caldas-Coulthard (2001:1) describe toys as resources for children:

'...with which they can explore the world in which they live, whether by "reading" them as 'texts' or by using them in manipulation, but they can also be loaded with explicit and sometimes implicit agendas by the designers of the industry, and in this sense they can form a repository of societies 'value systems' and 'ideologies'.

According to Resnick (2007), toys are essential parts of play and learning. The author argues that although children use different objects and material for play, they imagine, share ideas, and reflect on their experiences by means of these resources. Based on this, we could state that toys are produced for play and playful activities, but still many definitions of toys address their uselessness, and that they bring temporary happiness to the player that is easily replaced by new ones (Sutton-Smith 1997; Heljakka 2013). In a toy museum children most often cannot play with the displayed toys, but merely read them as texts, (van Leeuwen and Caldas-Coulthard, 2001).

Play is nevertheless a central expression in considering toys as children's playthings. In the toy museums visited, there was no sign of 'childish' playful activities, but then 'toys' connoted a different meaning for each curator as well, e.g., as collected toys or preserved nostalgic objects. In both cases this resulted in exhibits were that were specifically intended for an adult audience as a walk down memory lane.

Toys are considered as the 'archetypal symbols of childhood' (Darien-Smith and Pascoe 2013:7), wherein historians and archaeologists turn to children's material culture to fill in for the 'lack of children authored sources of the past' (Henrich 2014:134). However, the representation of toys as historical objects, are no different than other objects displayed in museums, which promote what Kirsehnblatt-Gimblett (1998:1) calls the two hallmarks of display, 1) the 'foreignness of the objects to the their context in the display' and 2) 'the location of meaning at their destination'. Context is essential to the representation of objects and provides opportunities as well as constraints on what meaning is represented through them (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). A teddy bear, with no personal narrative, is a static artifact on display: it conveys little history other than a date and the manufacturer; it is a foreign entity where 'meaning becomes detached and contextualized' (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 3).

The natural environment for a toy would be the one created by the child through imaginative play and relates to intangible heritage aspects of children's toys. Henrich (2014) illustrates the above point with the bear; a toy at a holocaust museum provides a different meaning compared to what was found in a migration museum or toy museum. An exhibit in 2015 at the Israeli Yad Vashem museum, Jerusalem on the Holocaust used children's toys, diaries, and poems to tell the horrific stories of what the children lived through at that point in history. As an example, a woman now in her 80s provided narratives of how she and her teddy bear communicated together and its company kept her family safe while giving them hope in an otherwise desperate time<sup>2</sup>. The combined knowledge of the woman's history with the bear provides an intangible aspect of the personal meaning attached to the teddy bear versus its otherwise static role as artifact. What this intangible aspect demonstrates is the ability of toys to carry complex significations as exceptional meaningful cultural objects (Brougere 2006) where personal narratives mediate and enrich the physicality of the toy.

The cultural significance of mass produced toys tends to override the value and importance of home made toys, which leads to a disparity of the latter in museums (Brookshaw 2009). Perhaps this is because homemade toys do not necessarily make worthy visual objects in exhibits as much of their construction is formulated in the child's imagination. However, often these toys provide the most playful curiosity, fun, and learning for small children. The United Nations Educational Scientific Organization (UNESCO) developed five domains of intangible heritage; four of them cover playful experiences related to toys (Davey, Darien-Smith, and Pascoe 2013):

- 1) *Oral traditions such as rhymes, nicknames, songs, chants;*
- 2) *Performing Arts like skipping rope, string games, pantomime, clapping games, hop-scotch;*

- 3) *Traditional Craftsmen or self constructed toys and play settings developed from a variety of materials and imagination; and*
- 4) *Social practices like role-playing, the inbetweenness of play that happens between going to and from school, and other games.*

Typically, these items are missing from representations of childhood, yet are very much apart of it. For a curator the intangible aspects add to the complexity of representing a child's creation of objects as playthings versus a physical cultural object.



Figure 1 and 2: Exterior of Museums. *Den Gamle By* is the large image. Image by A.J.Cole.

### Two countries, two landscapes, two discourses

To explore how children's voices and perspectives are included in toy museum exhibitions we carried out in-depth interviews with the lead curator of two toy museums (Figs. 1 and 2): *Den Gamle By* (The Old City) in Aarhus, Denmark and *Leksaksmuseet* (The Toy Museum) in Stockholm, Sweden. The participants in the study are not intended to be representative of a larger context of curators. Rather, the purpose of this study is in-depth understanding of the conditions and concerns surrounding curators when developing a museum exhibition where marginalized groups are represented. Through this examination, we identify the beliefs and

intentions that inform both the museum and curator. Accordingly, the method is qualitative and intended to capture communication in several sign systems and therefore, beside in-depth interviews, the research included photography as image-based data and observation/mapping of the exhibition layout.

The *semiotic landscape* is the overall driver for the analysis. Placing this in a museological context includes the objects curators chose to present and the specific viewpoint chosen to represent them; in other words, a specific context. It is a choice that arises from the socio-cultural history of the museum as well as of the curator and the existing knowledge of the objects' narrative. Thus, the same object in different contexts and hands will provide a uniquely different narrative.

For this analysis we have used the concepts of *framing* and *linking* (van Leeuwen, 2005) in order to identify and understand what kind of narratives that are communicated through the exhibited objects. *Framing* creates a sense of disconnect or connect between the elements in an exhibition, for example through empty spaces between exhibition cases. *Linking* refers to how items of information are linked to each other and, how the exhibited objects are linked to their context, which additionally includes the curator's interest and purpose (van Leeuwen, 2005).

When it comes to the understanding of the playful aspects of the narratives, we have applied two of UNESCO's above-mentioned four domains of intangible heritage, namely *self constructed toys and play settings* developed from a variety of materials and imagination, and *social practices*, in particular focusing on the inbetweenness of play, i.e. the play that can emerge in between or related to different activities.

### **Historical narratives of childhood**

Den Gamle By opened in 1909 as the world's first open air museum and is made up of 75 historic buildings from Denmark's past<sup>3</sup>. It is one of the country's top attractions (it has received three Michelin stars) where visitors walk down cobbled streets straight out of a Hans Christian Anderson story to the toy museum housed in an old warehouse from the 1600s. A placard dedicated to the collector who donated his toy collection to the museum is on the outside of the building. The toy museum opened in 1996 and according to the curator has remained the same ever since. The collection is made up of mostly German toys primarily from the late 1800s and early 1900s, to a few from the 1960s: it consists of approximately 10,000 toys with the majority being for boys. The interiors' are framed by warm lighting revealed old beams and wide wooden floorboards. According to the curator<sup>4</sup>, the intention was 'to give you the impression that your childhood was warm', or what the Danes call '*hyggelig*'. The curator with holds a degree in Archaeology and has worked at the

museum for many years. The exhibits are placed on two floors with the majority of exhibits placed on the first floor (Fig. 3).

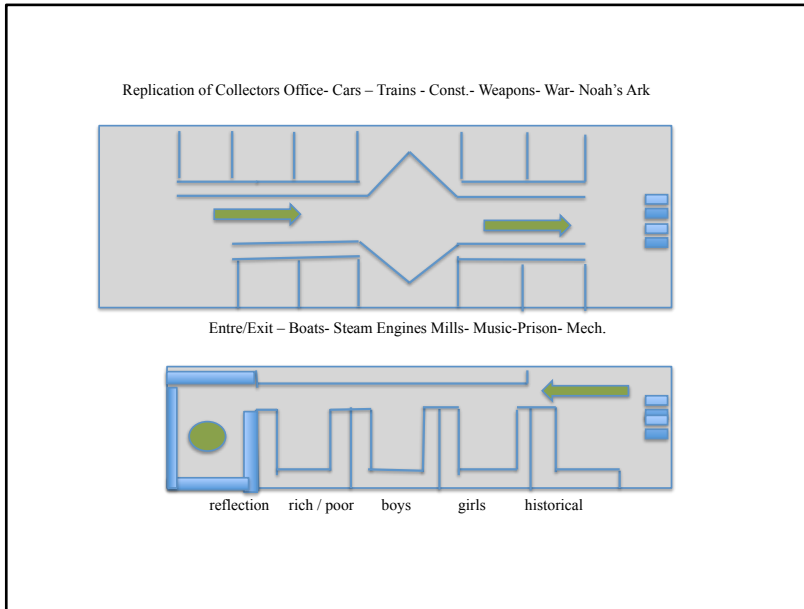


Figure 3: Mapping of Den Gamle By. The upper level is entry level and lower 'map' is upper level. Image by A. J. Cole.

The toys are arranged as 'a mixture between playing with toys and as a private collector might do'<sup>5</sup>, and closely linked to their history and related memories. The aspect of 'play' is brought into the exhibits through movement of certain toys, thematic sounds, and carefully considered vintage photographic black and white murals: each of these in their own right provides salient features that draw on the exhibits theme, which add a important visual connection to an otherwise static collection. These framing and contextual aspects exhibited nevertheless represent preserved adult nostalgia rather than children's playthings. A bench was intentionally attached to each exhibit providing both a resting place for adults and for smaller children to stand on and get a better view. The intent according to the curator was to develop interaction and narratives between parent and child, which was observed towards the end of our visit. This physical set up and the visual cues from the linking of different toys together with additional interpretive elements created a space, which enabled the visitors to share educational and joyful stories.

While standing in front of the exhibit of war-related toys with the sounds of guns being fired in the background, the curator suggested just that, 'this is a way for grandparents to talk about what they went through in the 1940s when the Germans

were here'<sup>6</sup>. Thus, it is through the various modes of the exhibit that communication can be seen as prompted transduction where the sound function as a supplement and support to the visual narrative (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). The results from the study showed that the linking of these different modes spatially extended the toys exhibited.

When we asked the curator whom the exhibits were created for, the answer was clear:

'Primarily collectors and adults, our favorite target was grandparents with small kids because kids in 1996 or 2012 don't know what this is so, most of the toys they don't recognize. They need their grandparent to tell them, 'Oh when I was young we used to play with this and this'<sup>7</sup>.

He then related a story to us concerning the musical toy exhibit (Fig. 4). A group of visiting children from a kindergarten pointed to a gramophone and said, 'WOW, WOW, there's a very old CD player!'<sup>8</sup> The curator pointed out that this type of comment by children provides the stimulus for narratives provided by grandparents/parents/teachers that enrich the child's experience. As previously noted, such a statement promotes a socially-mediated dialogue that has the potential to build on the child's existing knowledge. Through the narrative about the turntable and the CD player, the child explores intentions, values, knowledge that the parent built into it. This has implications for the design of exhibitions in museums, some narratives and learning are enabled and others are constrained.

The power of the curator is to display objects so that they can be transformed to creative and imaginary narratives for the visitors, and arrange them so that they might match the interests of the visitors. In this way, curators create conditions for the visitors to, bodily and verbally, share stories and make memories into shared conceptual systems (Nelson, 2011). So, even if the child cannot manipulate a certain toy in the exhibition, the narrative (and inherent dialogue) becomes superior to playing with the toy.

But what happens if the parents going through are too young to remember the toys on display- what becomes of the narrative? For displays that are set up as historical vignettes it at some point becomes problematic for a higher percentage of visitors to receive the intended meaning. In such cases meaning needs to come from other aspects of the exhibition's semiotic landscape such as written and visual narratives in the form of lighting, motion and sound for this museum, but also interactive images on screens where objects can come to life and tell a story as with the exhibit on war-related toys.

The exhibition at *Den Gamle By* is limited in the scope as the objects are from one collector; therefore, they provide a specific timeframe (late 1800s to mid 1900s) and his personal interest. While the lower floor was thematically exhibited the upper floor provided gender and lifestyle exhibits. Here the vignettes provided a glimpse inside the bourgeois world of high society at the turn of the nineteenth century: it was then as it is today, a world known by only a few Danish children.



Figure 4. "Wow, it's a CD player!" exhibit at Den Gamle By, Image by A. J. Cole.

According to Ingrid Henriksen, University of Copenhagen (Economic History Association, n.d.)<sup>9</sup>, it wasn't until the 1950s that industry overtook agriculture as the main source of the country's economy, even as seventy-five percent of the agricultural land was still farmed. Henriksen asserts that before 1914 industrial exports were approximately ten percent compared to agriculture having a sixty percent share. As of 2011, farming was still more than fifty percent of the country's land use. Knowing this, one needs to question why the exhibits place so much focus on world's that clearly did not exist for the Danish majority. It seems to beckon to the urban educated high society having more knowledge and importance—a superior one-upmanship. It also reflects the wealth and interest of the collectors whose collection is what the museum had to work with. How interesting a contrasting exhibit would be reflecting the childhood of the country life juxtaposed with that of the urban. However, this example is not alone in presenting exhibits of class distinction. Lynette Townsend (2012) refers to the same type of elitist

representation in research on the representation of children at two museums in New Zealand.

At *Den Gamle By* the 'girls' exhibit showed dolls, furnished doll houses, children's dish sets, sewing machines, and other gender appropriate toys reflecting how girls should emulate the role of their mothers in the demands of the home: an approach that recalls the ideology of the early part of the twentieth century (Fig. 5). The curator commented:

*'This one, without words, shows what we wanted our girls to do when they grow up like (pause) what they wanted their girls to do when they grow up. Anything at all you see here; are you cleaning house, are you nursing the kids [. . .] I just love the small items, real pictures [. . .] If you 've ever wondered what a family in 1848, I think, lived you can see it here' (he points to a doll house).<sup>10</sup>*



Figure 5. The 'Girls' Exhibit at Den Gamle By, Image by A.J. Cole, 2012

Thus, as with the majority of toys in the museum, the girl's toys also reflected those found in affluent households. Although informative from a historical view, such displays provide little to show changes or encourage change in the divide between classes or role distinction between genders. The curator seemed aware of this as he mentioned that many of the tin toys on the first floor would equal the average working man monthly pay in the 1949s. This provides an example where



additional text or other means of format could add a much needed comparison and/or prompt discussion about such divisive current issues.

To some extent the historical and bourgeois focus reflects the collector; however, the overall museum theme is to provide a sense of Denmark's history. To that extent it would benefit the museum to engage the public in collecting children's material culture and working more with other source communities, i.e., small towns; farming and island communities, and immigrant communities.<sup>11</sup> The exhibit provides a window on a small fragment of a Eurocentric society while failing to introduce the 'other' (Shepard, 1996). As a living museum, one can walk from the toy museum down a small alley and see a blacksmith or butcher at work, so the museum is not without providing a view of 'other'- it is just limited within the toy museum.

The boys' exhibit provided similar representation of an affluent boys' traditional role in society that included a circus set from the United States and a French orangeri. In the corner sitting up quite high was a castle with toy soldiers around its perimeter, while lower down was a large barn complete with a menagerie of farm animals and tractors. Whether the positioning of the two has any subtle significance is anyone's guess; moreover, we tend to assume it was because of the difference in size that the barn was lower than the house of royalty.

Counterpoint to these two exhibits was a one small display in a side area off the main corridor with simple stone toys from Denmark's prehistory and handmade toys and wooden toys, 'for the rest of the population'.<sup>12</sup> If the curator had not been with us, I am not sure we would have noticed or known about the prehistory toys as there was no form of narrative present. With the wealth of prehistory finds in Denmark in general, the basis of *Den Gamle By* as a historical museum, and the fact the curator was an archaeologist it is surprising no narratives were present.

The last exhibit returned to the 'toys wealthy child would play with on a Sunday afternoon, mostly educational toys'.<sup>13</sup> This illustrates the thematic nature of the display versus focusing on the actual history of individual children that leads to an unbalanced presentation of gender, wealth, and personal history (Shepard 1996).

The above-mentioned examples suggest that the semiotic landscape of *Den Gamle By* represented a material culture of childhood exhibiting selected narratives rather than a variety or, in terms of van Leeuwen (2005:256) a social unison where the toys exhibited 'sing or play the same notes'. In this way, the curator exposed a monophonic ensemble of voices rather than a multi-voiced culture of childhood or children. This way of acknowledging only some narratives and excluding others links the various toys by their similarity rather than by contrasting and pursues a biased bourgeois history.

However, the curator commented the exhibit was dated and that the toys were static. If financial resources were available, he would like to incorporate video screens that could show 3D movement of the toys along and additional information. Currently there are folders next to each display with the objects listed and dated in Danish; however the exhibits have brief descriptions for each exhibit presented in Danish, German, and English: he would also like the object lists in all three languages. He would like to remove many of the wooden boxes that provide different levels for the toys with ones that are clear. Mostly he would like to improve the lighting in order to focus in on specific toys. While these are all good initiatives there are at least two barriers, 1) money, which is problematic for most museums; and 2) museum management needs to share the curators' vision, in this case the manager's concerns were 'clean toilets, good coffee, and having something nice to look at'.<sup>14</sup> The curator noted there are differences of opinions on what should be taken as priorities.

### **Playful 'storyness'**

The *Leksaksmuseet* is situated within another museum, the *Spårvägmuseet* (Tram museum), a short distance from Stockholm's center.<sup>15</sup> The building is an old tram warehouse (Fig. 2) where the ceilings are 7-meter high supported by huge conical columns. To enter the toy museum the visitor takes a short journey through a portion of the tram museum, pass an open cafeteria, and then a small children's play area. The museum itself encompasses approximately 700 square meters on one floor, which despite its size is still 'too small' according to the curator, who is also a toy auctioneer and collector.<sup>16</sup> Consideration of the curators' background provides insight to understanding how the museum exhibits were arranged.

Toys in the museum range from the 1800s to present. The exhibition consists of collections from numerous collectors who specified that their collections should stay together as one unit and not being mixed with other collectors' collections. The curator stated that this creates restrictions, and that 'most of the collectors providing toys are men', hence, 'more space for boy toys'.<sup>17</sup> This provides the museum guests with repetition of sameness among the exhibits as seen in figure 6, where the blue area designates the boys area and yellow provides a space for toys for both genders.

This method of exhibiting is in line with the long cultural tradition of displaying toys (Heljakka, 2013), for example children playing with toy soldiers and other kinds of figures often spend time with arranging them (Hellendoorn and Harinck, 1999). Thus, it is no surprise that toy collectors find it personally rewarding to display their collections by their size, color, manufacturer, or aesthetics (Heljakka, 2013). Although both museums were 'collectors collections', *Leksaksmuseet* exhibition offered a markedly different semiotic landscape and socio-cultural interpretations of toys.

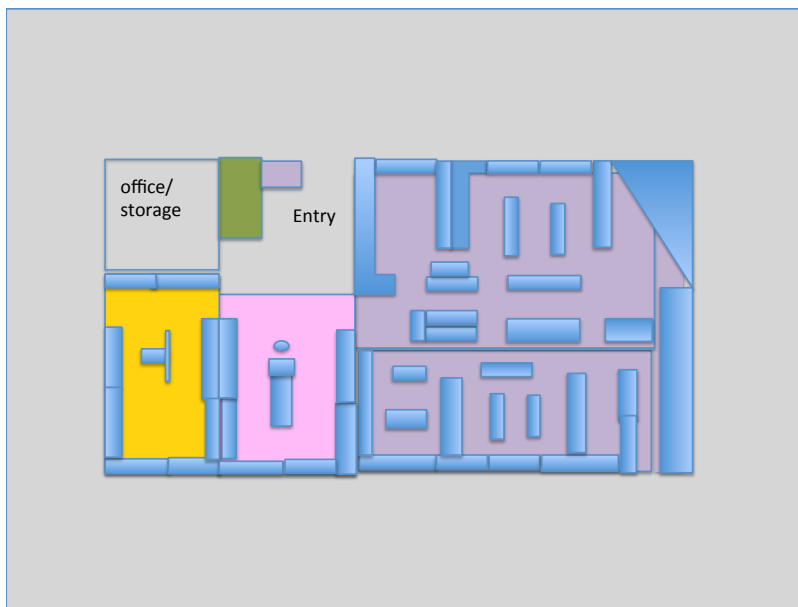


Figure 6. Mapping of Leksaksmuseet; mauve area is the boy's section, pink the girls, and yellow either. Map by A.J. Cole, 2012.

An overwhelming part of the landscape difference was reflected in exhibition cases (Fig. 6), which were a conglomeration of 'gifts from other museums, the very big cabinets are from north Stockholm that held animals and they are very old fashioned'.<sup>18</sup> The pink area in figure 6 designates the limited space for girls toys (primarily dolls, Barbie and family, foreign dolls, and doll houses), there is one exhibit case in the silhouette of a house painted a pale pastel shade, although the curator mentioned he had more of these they were not in use. Janet Marstine (2006) suggests that framing control the viewing process by setting contextual boundaries that influence our understanding of what is included. However, in the haphazard methodology of object placement this exhibit did not communicate any difference from one display to the next. At the same time, this chaotic and seemingly unsystematic way of exhibiting toys at the Leksaksmuseet created relevance for the visitors and invited them to acknowledge the objects as something it was possible to do something with rather than just being static items.

While observations were not on our agenda, we visited the Stockholm museum unknowingly during a school break making it difficult not to make some observations of relevance. There were several groups of young children (approximately four to eight years old) visiting with their caretakers or parents. Some of the children ran around to several of the exhibits—seemingly knowing where to go to seek out the 'active' parts of the exhibit. According to R.F. Law in his Masters Dissertation on *Representation of Childhood in Museums*, museums view such 'school groups' as *passive* participants coming to the museum on school

visits or on holidays and relate to them more as a commodity for the pedagogical and didactical concerns relevant to the museums to be seen as educational institutes (cited in Roberts 2006:155). Emphasis is placed on the word 'passive' as it implies that children play a non-active role when the exhibition is planned or in the overall learning that might take place (Shepard, 1996).

Additionally, the children observed were more concerned with the objects themselves rather than with the chaotic manner the toys were exhibited. Two young boys were darting from one exhibit to another before settling down in front of the LEGO exhibit where they pointed to the exhibit and then chatted with one another (Fig. 7). It appeared that they were very physically engaged in gesturing while creating and sharing narratives about the toys in front of them. In the words of Daniel Spock (2010:121) 'children find their experiences more memorable and positive when they are fully engaged in active, imaginative thinking'. From what we could observe these young boys were immersed in their own experiences with LEGOs communicated by the display. This can be understood as mediation between the object and the child where the toy moves from being an ethnographic object in a museum to that of an agent that initiates dialogues between two people looking at it. Children have the ability to play, in this case, view the toy as a social product from their own culture. In other words, the chaos seemingly encouraged the children to learn and internalize social and cultural practices (Petersson, 2006).



Figure 7. LEGO section showing two young boys in discussion about what they see.  
Image A.J. Cole, 2012.

This is to say that they do not play directly with what adult society produces (Brougere, 2006), instead they make their own interpretations adding to the complexity of the social process. At this level the child becomes a co-producer with adults in the world of significations through their playful activity; a very Scandinavian concept of play activity (Sommer et. al. 2010). Although play and narratives are not the same, Sutton-Smith (1997: 171) points to a connection through children's 'phantasmagorical play', which is a kind of imaginary play based on ingredients in children's narratives and daydreams, offering children opportunities to (re-) articulate their own cultural interpretations and fantasies through framings and their own mutual negotiations. In this sense, the children we observed created connections between play and narratives, which were embedded in social practices and situations determined by the participating children's imagination, influencing the nature and pattern of interaction with the exhibit by sharing their understanding and experiences with the toys exhibited and with toys in general. The exhibit represented a social practice that was closely linked to the children's lifeworld and perception of their own history and memory and the children created their own play space where they passed on their experiences to each other (UNESCO, 2003).

Whereas *Leksaksmuseet* did not have a defined educational agenda, most of the children stayed as groups moving with their caretaker through the exhibit. Our observations showed that it was only when pairs of children broke away from the group that their interest and activity seemingly heightened. This is backed up by research that suggests that such a reaction is the norm. Falk and Dierking (2000) refer to research done by Janette Griffin, who found that children prefer to go to museums with their family so they can choose their own interests versus school groups where their interests are constrained and decided for them.

Even though we observed much activity by children the curator suggested he would like to integrate more opportunities for children to be active. The curator suggested he would like the addition of playful physical elements in between or under displays that children could move through:

*'It's enough with a big barrow and it can be between some cabinets and you can go in and out, or put something in a corner. It's enough with a house that you can look through a window, you could paint it red or blue or yellow'.<sup>19</sup>*

Furthermore, he emphasized that different kinds of narrative and play spaces were needed in order to open up area for children and parents to share activities: 'In that little space we have storybooks so parents can read to the children /.../ And also, this museum has a very big space and has room for children to play.' In this way, the curator had the intention to, through creating place and space, foster that

this specific cultural heritage was passed on between generations, providing reflective and playful forms of 'storyness'.

However, good intention does not equate to having the finances, space to implement the ideas, or the management in alignment. The curator stated that although the chairman of the board was an 'enthusiastic eighty-four year old that would like to continue as chairman for another 'seventy-five years'!<sup>20</sup> He continued by commenting that the chairman felt 'no resources were available', which is counter to what the curator and most of the museums' board believed. The curator thought 'younger members should be brought into the board'—something he pointed to as 'not being all that easy to accomplish'.

Younger members can create change, as Townsend (2012) discovered in her work at Te Papa in New Zealand. She found that young curators who have museology training are more likely to embrace the concepts of new museology. One young history curator specifically sought children's cultural objects that suggested more social influence than her predecessors, i.e., paper dolls and other objects of everyday life. Other forms of change could be comprised with inexpensive changes such as a coat of colorful paint on the exhibition wall or cases, or a focal point at the entrance that provides a visual element shouting 'childhood' without additional narratives. Such was the case at the Kid Size: Great Toys from Our Childhood organized by the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts where the exhibit entry portals and room dividers implemented the use of primary colors and simple geometric forms associated with childhood (Van Slyck, 2004). In writing about the exhibit, Van Slyck suggests the oversize shapes provided adults with a reminder of feeling small and childlike.

Leksaksmuseet was shaped by aesthetics where the affordances should satisfy both collectors' and children's requirements and needs. This was accomplished mainly through the linking of different collections in order to produce a politically correct and playful style of aesthetics. The main emphasize was on the fact that the different toy collections should be kept together and that children and adults should navigate through the exhibition driven by remembering and curiosity, where play was represented through an unstructured layout and the inclusion of modern days toys. There was no inclination of the bourgeois attitude of Den Gamle By seen here; instead toys were shown as simple as they were given to the museum—worn, torn, or ready to go or a collectors show. The curator expressed his attitude as: 'I am most interested in old toys, homemade unique toys, a cultural part of the Swedish childhood. You cannot buy them. I can always buy an expensive doll to collect, but those toys that are cheap, or that a child made herself are more valuable.'

### ***Vroom, Vroom: contrasting car exhibits***

No matter what variety of toys we selected for comparison the differences would be substantial just due to the physical constraints of the exhibit spaces and their overall context. For example, we examined both museums' methods of representing cars. In Den Gamle By the car exhibit (Fig. 8) presents a graphic backdrop of a nearby city showing a cobbled stone street with a horse and buggy from around the early 1900s providing a salient feature as well as a historical timeframe for the exhibit. Historical continuity is kept with the age of the toys displayed and centered in the exhibit is a toy horse and buggy offering a connection back to the graphic.

The cars and other transportation vehicles are positioned on different size cubes of varying heights creating small vignettes incorporating gas lamps and gas pumps from the era. This multimodal method of developing the display allows visitors to focus on more details; therefore, providing more opportunity for narratives between parent and child. When dirigibles flying overhead come to life with a whirring sound above the exhibit the sounds creates a playful sensory cue enhancing the overall exhibit.



*Figure 8: Vroom vroom, car exhibits. Insert is at Leksaksmuseet and background is at Den Gamle By. Image A.J. Cole, 2012.*

In the *Leksaksmuseet* there were numerous exhibits with cars; according to the curator this is due to cars being a favorite item of the collectors who donate their collections to the museum. A car exhibit centrally located in a large cabinet provides a good comparison of just how many objects are in the *Leksaksmuseet* collection (Fig. 8). Unlike *Den Gamle By*, cars and other transportation vehicles are placed on glass shelves with the largest wooden vehicles on the bottom. There is no specific timeframe for the objects as they are from different periods during the 1900s.

Since essentially collectors designed their own exhibits, several of the cars have the original boxes with them, signifying added value for the collectors and salience for the viewer. At the same time they provide a semiotic resource as the 'graphics' and 'text' can help spark childhood memories for the older museums guests. The *Leksaksmuseet* curator commented on the opportunity for engagement and dialogue between parent and child when adults would recognize a car from their past. Thus, the car became a mediator for further conversation on cars, their childhood, or play. Through such mediation the car stimulates memory for the adult and learning for the child (cf. Wertsch 1993). On this same idea, Miller (2008) states that a visual display includes a potential story or an externalized memory.

### **Concluding comments**

We have investigated how two Scandinavian toy museums represent the material culture of children. Through our interviews with lead curators and the concept of 'semiotic landscape' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) we were able to answer our initial questions concerning intended audience, who was involved in the exhibition development, and whether the narratives provided a voice of children or of childhood. What we found were two very distinct semiotic landscapes: one historical and the other a hodge-podge of various collectors' collections. These different semiotic arrangements were grounded in the curators' personal, social, and institutional considerations and choices, which resulted in the two different strategies to the display of children's cultural objects.

The semiotic resources used by both museums suggested the toy as an ethnographic object that was able to represent both the material culture of children (*Leksaksmuseet*) and of childhood (*Den Gamle By*). For the latter, we initially perceived that its historical context provided more possibilities for playful meaning making through its well-defined visual themes, backgrounds, active objects, and sounds that provided implicit narratives. In hindsight, both museums provided this opportunity. *Leksaksmuseet* through its maze of exhibit cabinets and disarray of colorful objects, essentially creating an environment and landscape for children to discover and inhabit as their own. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) refer to this kind of dynamic and unstructured landscape as a known and natural environment for



children. While at *Den Gamle By* the few guests we saw had very young children who were carried by their parents; in this instance the adults prompted narratives. This provided a different form of narrative stimulus than the ‘WOW, it’s a CD’ story told by the curator. Either way, the interactive mediation between object and viewer created a sensory engagement that allowed for playful interaction and imagination. It provides a reminder that each of us, whether curator, collector, guest, or researcher will have their own toy related memories that induce social and affective responses.

The historical and to a great extent bourgeois emphasis at *Den Gamle By* was visually appealing but lacked relevance to the childhood of most Danish children in the early 1900s. Due to the collection only a few vignettes provided any sense of average children’s toys. The addition of textual narratives could have communicated such distinctions and mentioned the significant role children had growing up on farms, or small villages as being equally important as children from wealthy families.

Possible solutions could be, affording a venue for pensioners and others to provide such narratives to museum would support community involvement and be an inexpensive resource to update the exhibit while adding value to the collection. A similar method has been used at The National Museum of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ATSI) curatorial team have subtle signage within the gallery asking for help to identify objects as well as on the museums website. This has been very successful partnership with the source communities so personal narratives can be attached to objects and misinformation corrected.<sup>21</sup>

To some extent, the overall design layout of the *Leksaksmuseet* allowed children to move around freely while its carefree manner of exhibiting provided visual stimulus. This promoted children to be able to make sense of the exhibits and play without adult direction, This is in agreement with the statement by Smith and Pascoe (2012:4) that children are ‘active agents on their own’ and is inline with current Scandinavian early childhood pedagogy (Hakarainen, 2004; Pramling and Carlsson, 2008; Sommer, et al., 2010).

From a child’s perspective toys simply signify play (Pramling and Carlsson, 2008). What the two semiotic landscapes illustrate is even when toys have been decontextualized and *re*-contextualized as objects of childhood for collectors and curators alike, toy museums do have the capacity to include children’s perspective in the exhibition. The focus on child versus children’s perspectives at both locations was motivated primarily on the former through the adults who constructed the exhibits and the caretakers / parents who took children to the museum.

Mr Rogers was correct—there are no boundaries for children’s play as they can find ‘play’ in places and ways that we as adults cannot.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Fred Rogers, Strong National Museum of Play. Accessed 21 July 2012. <http://www.museumofplay.org/education/education-and-play-resources/play-quotes>.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Goldman, 'Holocaust Remembrance Day: Museum Showcases Survivors' Toys', NBC news online <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/holocaust-museum-exhibit-showcases-child-survivors-victims-n341896> (last visited 17 April 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> Den Gamle By, Århus, Denmark. <http://www.dengamleby.dk/the-old-town/>, last accessed 21 July 2014.
- <sup>4-6</sup> Jan Ingvordsen, interview with Anne Jodon Cole and Eva Petersson Brooks (authors), digital recording, 29 March 2012, *Den Gamle By*, Århus, Denmark.
- <sup>7</sup> Henriksen, Ingrid (n.d.) 'Economic History of Denmark', Economic History Association. <http://eh.net/?s=Ingrid+Henriksen> (last accessed 15 April 2015)
- <sup>8-10</sup> Jan Ingvordsen, interview with authors, digital recording, 29 March 2012, *Den Gamle By*, Århus, Denmark.
- <sup>11</sup> Denmark consists of 406 islands, 70 of which are inhabited. Jutland, the part of Denmark where the museum lies is a peninsula connecting the country to continental Europe. Copenhagen is on the island of Zealand in the east of the country, while the city of Odense (home of Hans Christian Andersen) is on the island of Fyn linked to Jutland and Zealand by bridges.
- <sup>12-14</sup> Jan Ingvordsen, interview with Anne Jodon Cole and Eva Petersson Brooks (authors), digital recording, 29 March 2012, *Den Gamle By*, Århus, Denmark.
- <sup>15</sup> *Leksaksmuseet*, Stockholm, Sweden. <http://www.leksaksmuseet.se/html/english.htm>, last accessed 21 July 2014.
- <sup>16-20</sup> Mike Makusu, interview with authors, digital recording, 28 February 2012, *Leksaksmueet*, Stockholm, Sweden.
- <sup>21</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders department, two curators (requested anonymity) in interview with Anne J. Cole, digital recording, 19 April 2012, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia.

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## **ARTICLE 2**

## OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 2

**Title:** Inclusive Indigenous Australian Voices in the Semiotic Landscape of the National Museum of Australia

**Authors:** Anne Jodon Cole, MA. & Eva Petersson Brooks, PhD., both Aalborg University, Denmark. Centre for Design Learning and Innovation, Writing Relationship: (70/30 %)

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**Abstract:** Australian history began with the Dreaming approximately 40 to 60,000 years ago, and not when Europeans landed in Sydney's Botany Bay. Research specifies the need for museums to be socially responsible in the representation of the various communities it represents. This article examined the curator's representation of source communities in two exhibits in the *First Australians Galleries* at the National Museum of Australia through the concepts of *multi-voicedness*, *semiotic landscape*, and *agency*. The qualitative methodology included semi-structured interviews with curators, image-based and document analysis. Findings showed that the exhibition's semiotic landscape was framed by the collaboration of voices between museum curators and Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander communities. The curators emphasized the moral value of their work in consulting with Indigenous communities; suggesting that the curators have positioned themselves as change agents, which empowers the source communities as well as strengthen the museum's standing within those communities.

**Key words:** curators, Indigenous source communities, semiotic landscape, multivoicedness, representation, social responsibility

**Aim & Background:** The concept of 'post museum' suggests social responsibility is tied to how a museum represents culture and creates self-identity. The article attempts to better understand how curators at a national museum represent and frame the narratives of its Indigenous people.

**Method:** A semi-formal interview was conducted with two curators from the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Gallery at the NMA. . Content analysis of the social language used by the curator in the interview was cross-checked with various forms of data collected (annual report, governing documents, empirical research, and photographs of the exhibits). Two specific areas were investigated: multivoicedness and semiotic landscape.

**Findings & Conclusion:** Curators are influenced by many complex voices: the Institution of the museum, its physical environment, governing documents, and the source communities. The semiotic landscaped was framed by emotive design values, where an artwork provided the voice of more than just the artist and where an exhibit of art hanging in the offices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission (ATSIC) provided a voice of change in governmental policy. Both curators referred to the importance and need to seek out the knowledge of the source communities for the narratives provided in the museum exhibitions.



## **Inclusive Indigenous Australian Voices in the Semiotic Landscape of the National Museum of Australia**

*Museums and galleries of all kinds have both the potential to contribute towards the combating of social equality and a responsibility to do so.*

*- Richard Sandell (2002, p.3)*

### **Introduction**

The history of Australia did not begin in 1788 with the arrival of European settlers. It began with the Dreaming; a time in the distant past when the creation ancestors appeared in Australia and began their journeys across the land some 40 to 60,000 years ago. It was these ancestors who “held the first ceremonies, sang the first songs and created the designs that have continued into the living present” (Issacs, 2007, p. 10). For Indigenous Australians<sup>1</sup>, the arts continue to provide a societal core that connects spiritual and secular life (Issacs, 2007). Cultural and spiritual traditions have continued with each passing generation, including the passing on of traditional knowledge through storytelling (Rose, 2000; Bruno, 2002). These traditions have continued despite the actions of early settler nations that removed Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders from their land, culture, language, and spiritual values (Smith 2012).

Museums the world over present and *represent* history framed by social and cultural considerations (Sandell, 2002). Since the concept of “new museology” (Vergo, 1989) was initiated, “museums have been concerned with the need to more adequately represent cultural diversity in their exhibitions,” in addition to “expanding their audience” (Kreps, 2015, p.5). Likewise, in *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Richard Sandell (2002) conveys apprehension for what he sees as the social roles and responsibilities of museums of “ameliorating” the symptoms of social injustice (p. xvii). It is only when museums improve or better their stance on social injustice that they can have a positive impact on the lives of marginalized people and become a facilitator for social change through empowering the specific communities it represents (Sandell, 2002). This has led to changes in curatorial practices to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives and approaches known as “appropriate museology” (Kreps 2008, 2015).

Christina Kreps believes that museums are making strides to be more responsive to the needs of minority and Indigenous communities and more “sensitive to their rights to have a voice in how their cultures are represented and heritage curated” (2009, p. 193). Appropriate museology suggests museum development and heritage work should adapt to local cultural contexts and

socioeconomic conditions. Ideally, "it is a bottom-up, community-based approach that combines local knowledge with those of professional practices to better meet the needs and interests of a particular museum and its community" (Kreps, 2015, p.6).

Both Kreps and Sandell's considerations align with Janet Marstine's "new museum ethics" (2011) where moral agency acts a pivot for "principles of diversity, shared authority, and social justice" (Kreps, 2015, p.6). Kreps notes that these principles are integral to contemporary museum work, and combined they "define the socially responsible museum" (2015, p.7).

Additionally, social justice concerns have developed in parallel with various legislations and organizational mandates including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 along with other guidelines and procedures for museums developed in the mid 2000s<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, these guidelines were developed four years before Australia accepted DRIP. In 2015, the NMAs museum council approved the Indigenous cultural rights and engagement policy and procedures (ICIP), to "guide its engagement with Indigenous Peoples and their cultural heritage" (NMA Annual Report 2014-15, p. 45).

Post-museum and appropriate museologies seek to re-identify a museum's power through sharing it with the communities it represents. It empowers such groups by listening and encouraging active participation rather than shying away from what could be considered difficult issues (Marstine, 2006, 2011; Kreps 2015).

The aim of this article is to understand a curator's perspective, as a product of social action and cultural history, of representing and framing the narratives of the nation's Indigenous peoples in the context of a national museum. Our concern is how the *curators* create this context—it is not, nor was it intended to or include the visitors perspective of the meaning exhibited—our specific concern is *whose voice(s)* influence the narrative exhibited. How a curator chooses to represent a source community affects what is communicated outward by the museum. Our aim is grounded in the question, how does the voice(s) of the source community influence the narratives represented by the museum curators?

### **Multi-voiced Semiotic Landscapes**

For national museums, defining "nation" and "national" can be problematic. Roger G. Kennedy (2004), a former director of the National Museum of American History, states that every national museum is vastly different and points to the "presentation of a nation's rich diversity" while maintaining the "ability to retain apartness while respectfully learning from one another" (p. 306). In this article, the social and cultural diversity emphasized by Kennedy is acknowledged through the

use of two distinct concepts; *multi-voicedness* (Wertsch, 1993, 1998), and the *semiotic landscape* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2005). These theoretical concepts provide the tools to analyze how a curator creates a plurality of voices in the narratives exhibited.

More specifically the plurality of voices is concerned with the blending of the source community and museum curator's knowledge, along with other voices within the museum that influence the curator's representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples. In line with Wertsch (1993), this view suggests that the museum's semiotic landscape is a toolbox consisting of diverse voices; consequently, museum exhibitions are constructed via cultural means that represent specific meanings and values (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

The concept of semiotic landscape provides a metaphor that encompasses the museums as a whole (its architecture and overall spatial design), each exhibition space and each exhibit within an exhibition. Consider for a moment the museums as a physical landscape in nature where the museum's overall architecture and physical setting provides the visual and social landscape for the narratives inside. The interior landscape is comprised of each exhibition space (and the exhibits acting as micro landscapes within them) similar to flora and fauna in a mountain meadow. Extending the metaphor, consider the different exhibitions as meta landscapes with their own history and culture. This is no different than when the various sections of a mountain meadow (think exhibitions) afford how flora and fauna (objects and narratives in exhibitions) develop in it. Natural landscapes like museum landscapes influence us through their significance, which depends on how we understand or interpret them (Bakhurst, 2007).

From this, we suggest that museum exhibitions emerge in response to different social, cultural, historical, and institutional values. From a curator's perspective, these values can be understood as providing access to different narratives/artifacts. Additionally, there is the need to implement these various voices in the exhibition's design. Thus, the curator shapes *and* is shaped by multiple voices, such as the cultural and historical values of the society, the museum's mission statement and policy, and whether the museum considers source communities roles. These diverse aspects are part of a curator's toolbox. Combined these voices communicate a process of *mediated agency* (Wertsch, 1993).

Our focus on multi-voicedness also stems from various scholarly writings, such as Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999), an Aboriginal Australian who considers "Indigenous Australians, like First Nations Peoples around the globe" to be "arguably, the most studied people in the world" (p. 109). Indigenous peoples now want research to provide self-determination, which is controlled by the community (Rigney, 1999; Langton, 2011; Smith 2012; Lonetree 2012). This initiates a change from the control and power of British systems developed from the construction of "race" years earlier (Rigney, 1999, p. 112; also Langton, 2011). With the participation of Indigenous communities and their sharing of traditional knowledge,

the value and authenticity of their social, cultural, and historical formations can replace what has been suppressed by dominant settler culture (cf., Grieves, 2003; Lonetree, 2012; Smith, 2012; Langton, 2013; Nakata, 2014).

The exhibitions within a museum create specific representations that infer what the curator wants to represent about a specific feature and how such representations are communicated, i.e., made appropriate for a particular audience (Kress et al., 2014). Schärer (2003) stated that exhibitions appear as “explanatory visualizations of absent facts through objects, and methods used to display these” (in ICOFOM, 2009, p. 36). By separating an object from its context it becomes fragmented, or a de-contextualized object of reflection (Wertsch, 1993). In addressing these issues, a key challenge for curators is how to contextualize the thoughts and views of the source community where the objects originated (ICOM, 2013, paragraph 4, 3). Thus, the question becomes, what kind of semiotic potentials emerge when curators try to re-contextualize a new sort of context from outside their socio-cultural framework that can exist alongside the original one established within the source community (Wertsch, 1993)?

The subject of semiotic potentials brings up another challenge for curators, namely how the choices they make impact the voice(s) through which the design of the exhibition speaks. In other words, whose voice is represented, and how does its design relate to diversity, sharing authority and social responsibility (cf. Bakhtin, 1986)? Regarding this, we suggest in communicating historical and cultural representations in respect to all peoples (ICOM, 2013, paragraph 4, 2), curatorial voices become enhanced by the process of listening to and implementing the voice of a given source community. This process involves time and patience to build relationships of trust (Kreps, 2009), and it requires understanding that tangible and intangible objects have inherent values to Indigenous peoples (Martin and Mirraabooa, 2009; Smith, 2012; Lonetree, 2012).

In this article, the concern is the *give and take* of information between the specific Indigenous Australian community being represented and the museum curators. Anne Edwards (2007) argues that this is a form of relational agency that involves a capacity to ask for support from others, negotiate, mediate, and then to act upon it. The process of give and take suggests a there is a mutual strengthening of collective expertise (Hakkarainen et al., 2004) through encouraging intensified inter-acts between participants and their ability to expand on their interpretations. “Interacts” refers to an “act of speaking” and is a form of an exchange that implies giving and receiving responses (Halliday 1985,p.68). We recognize such forms of inter-acts as enabling shifts in identity (cf. Edwards and Mackenzie, 2008).

For analysis of multi-voicedness, we have used the concept of *social language* to understand and acknowledge the social and cultural diversity inherent when representing marginalized groups of peoples. Social language is detailed in the Voices in Context section of the first case study. The concept of *semiotic landscape* is offered as an analytical tool to reflect upon the multi-voicedness and to

understand the specific values framed in the museum exhibitions. Furthermore, we applied the concept of *agency* as an analytical tool to examine a particular Aboriginal Australian artwork by Peta Edwards (Can you Imagine? [Mum's story]) illustrates her mother's narrative of being part of the Stolen Generations and the reestablishment of cultural identity. This narrative is elaborated in the Exhibited Identities section of the second case study.

## The Cases

This study was carried out in mid-April 2012 at the National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra, in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Galleries. The cases place focus on the *Link-Up: Bringing them Home* exhibition and the *Off The Walls: Art from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Affairs Agencies* exhibition. The participants in the study were two established curators working in the *First Australians Galleries*, and they are not intended to be representative of a larger context of curators. Rather, the purpose of this case study is an in-depth understanding of the influences and concerns surrounding curators when planning a museum exhibition involving the representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples. By examining this practice and the beliefs and intentions that inform it, we have identified that the policy environment of the museum and the social context in which curators' work affords opportunities and constraints for curators to enact their role.

The method used was qualitative and intended to capture communication in several sign systems; therefore, the research includes document analysis (annual reports and government documents), in-depth semi-structured interviews with two curators and photographs as image-based data. The interviews were transcribed and written verbatim followed by an identification of central concepts, which were transferred into certain themes. The guiding principle for the theme creation was tied to the objective of understanding the ways in which museum exhibitions represent and frame different narratives of Indigenous peoples' representation in national museums. The emerging themes were *voices in context* and *exhibited identities*. The analytical concepts used when elaborating these themes are detailed within each of the sections below.

The museum's semiotic landscape begins with its setting. The National Museum of Australia lies on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra. Complex angles and the "vibrant pallet of colors" (NMA website) of the museum's architecture greet visitors on the exterior and interior. According to the architects, the juxtaposed angles suggest the tangled stories of Australia (Reed, 2002). The museum's architecture incorporates cultural references and symbolic metaphors that link the building to the narratives presented in the exhibitions (Casey, 2002). The *First Australians Galleries* are situated at the farthest end of the building; interestingly, the way into the galleries is also the way out (Fig.1).



*Figure 1. Lower level with 'Off the Walls' exhibit to the left. Photo used with permission of the NMA, image by A.J. Cole, 2012.*

### **CASE 1: Voices in Context**

The activity of designing museum exhibitions is a complicated one for curators. It implies not only being sensitive to the needs of marginalized groups (Kreps, 2009, 2015), but also to incorporate voices expressed by the museum's policies, national politics, and their personal voices, which represent their values, and visions of society and culture (Grant, 2003). Thus, a fundamental part of designing an exhibition includes negotiating possible contradictions resulting from tensions and differences in priorities.

We draw on the notion of *social language* in our analysis of how this diversity of voices impacts on the utterances the curator uses when composing an exhibition, or in other words, a specifically designed-for-purpose narrative. Bakhtin (1986) introduced the concept of social language, which is associated with particular groups of speakers, e.g., the language of the curator, the museum director and board, and national politics, stating that any utterance is produced by a certain voice with a specific viewpoint. In this way, the concept of social language draws attention to the ways curators negotiate the meaning of different voices through social languages. Wertsch (1993; 1998) argues that a heterogeneity of voices exists in every situation, which is to say that there is no single way or an obvious best way to represent events and objects in a situation. In the context of this article, the term

social language serves as a tool to distinguish the language used by a curator from a national one.

Our analysis is framed by an interview with one of the curators at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra while walking through the temporary exhibition, *Off the Walls: Art from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Affairs Agencies*. The exhibition highlighted over 2200 objects of art found on the walls and in the cabinets of the Aboriginal Development Commission and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)<sup>3</sup> government offices between the years 1967 to 2005 (Fig.2). Government officials chose to place Indigenous Australian art on their walls to reflect the people working with them and those they were working for. On the closure of the offices, couriers packed up the artwork and placed the objects in storage; thus, the exhibit's artwork is literally “off the walls” (McKendry, 2012).



Figure 2. ‘Off the Walls’ front case exhibit. Photo used with permission of the NMA, image by A.J. Cole, 2012.

In 2007, the artwork was moved to the museum so it could be preserved and became the “ATSI Affairs Collection” (from signage in the exhibit). The collection includes bark paintings, watercolors, baskets, posters, and shell necklaces. The exhibition was divided into four main exhibits set up as office settings representing the decades from the 1970s to 2000 complete with equipment, newspapers, and letters. Panels introducing each decade provided a timeline of Australian Aboriginal

issues placing the *Off the Walls* exhibition as “art in the context of cultural politics” (McKendry, 2012, p. 18). An area beyond the offices displayed more works of art and artifacts.

### **Moral and Legal Voices**

Analysis of the interview with the curator showed that the characteristics of social language – appropriated voices of others – were typically combined with reflections of moral and legal voices surrounding some of the objects on display representing both Indigenous Australians and ‘nation.’ Legal voices refer to museum policy and government influences.

The boundaries between moral and legal issues within the collection are enhanced through understanding the development of the museum. The National Museum of Australia opened in March 2001. The ground research for the museum came about through a national inquiry in 1975 known as the Pigott Report. The report findings were incorporated in the Museum of Australia Bill introduced into the House of Representatives in 1980 (Bolton 2003). The Minister confirmed that the museum would center on three interrelated themes: the interaction of people with the environment; Australian social history since 1788; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture (NMA.gov). When referring to the last area the minister stated (Bolton, 2003, p. 2):

*The Museum of Australia will not give mere token recognition to Aboriginal history and culture. Nor will it portray that history and culture in a way considered suitable by Europeans. In effect, Aboriginal people are invited to explain their histories and the richness of their culture.*

Furthermore, the political voice is grounded in the Aboriginals Protection Act, which in 1869 began to establish Aboriginal Protection Boards. This Act began the process of trying to westernize Aboriginal Australians: a process removing them from their land, their culture, and spiritual values. Indigenous peoples are constantly reworking their “understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism” within Indigenous politics (Smith, 2012, p. 25). Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, suggests two threads drawn by Indigenous peoples are (2012, p. 25):

*One draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. We had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into and lived in a universe, which was entirely of our own making. We did not ask, need, or want to be ‘discovered’ by Europe. The second Strand of the language of critique demands we have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future.*



Other Indigenous scholars share Smith's reflection (Grieves, 2003; Rigney, 2009; Langton, 2011, 2013; Lonetree, 2012). Smith's quote refers to the need of the native voice in the ongoing process of decolonization. According to the curator, similar 'political voices' in Australian history are an "attempt for self-determination" in which the nation voted to allow the federal government to "make laws related to Indigenous peoples for the whole country" (in the interview, April 2012).

Consequently, the *Off The Walls* exhibit was a process to give exposure to Australia's Indigenous communities and provide a representative context for the collection. Interestingly, the curator stated, the museum was asked by the government, "to just put an exhibition up on the art collection." This statement seems to imply that the curators should decontextualize the objects by disconnecting them from the settings where they were encountered. Thus, the government's suggestion would have placed the uniqueness of the 'ATSI Affairs collection' into a context-independent universality with generalized meanings, rather than the context-sensitive approach the curator's sought (Bakhurst, 2007; Wertsch, 1993).

### **Inclusive Voices**

The above example reflects on the curators' realization of how they "could best return the collection metaphorically to that community." It considers that the creation of such an exhibit was "a sensitive thing to tackle because Aboriginal people who worked at the commission were very angry at the removal of artwork from Aboriginal control" (in the interview, 2012). In this light, the curators tried to apply an open and inclusive approach by posting images of every object on the Internet to broadly reach out to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities asking for their contribution to help understand the objects and to point out any mistakes in the curators' documentation. Similar signage was posted within the exhibit.

During the interview, the curator stated that she wanted to "make sure that it is not just non-Indigenous curators driving the whole thing." This approach was successful as the curator received interesting and informative feedback that helped to sort out questions on which artists had painted or created specific works of art (curator in the interview, 2012). However, the process was not straightforward, as negotiations between the various parties were necessary for the curator to be able to re-contextualize Australian history while "avoiding using *our* voice and trying to use the voice of the people pictured" (curator in the interview, 2012). During the interview, the curator elaborated on this stating, "what we are always interested in here is to tell the story, telling history through the objects . . . words have one power, but the juxtaposition of objects might be even more powerful."

The process of setting up the *Off The Walls* exhibit included negotiations between the curators and individual Aboriginal artists as well as whole communities. In doing so, the curators used both archival and oral history; the latter, refuting critical voices suggesting, “unless something is written down it does not have legitimacy” (curator in the interview, 2012). This issue of how mediational means emerge and shape actions in response to various social, cultural, and historical forces (Wertsch, 1993; 1998) implied that the curators made efforts to re-contextualize (Wertsch, 1985) the art, which they valued as a moral action. The curator emphasized the museum was “caring” for the collection rather than “owning” it (curator in the interview, 2012).

### **Case I Summary**

We outlined a few implications that followed from interpreting the dialogic interactions of a museum exhibition as influenced by social language. Dialogic interactions refer to both the curators’ who produced the exhibit within the social context of the museum and the source community members who provided information on the various works of art. The collaboration between the two regulated what was ‘said’ through the placement of objects in each of the given offices. Such collaborative interactions provide affordances that support the action of representation while providing learning and shifts in identity for all participants; otherwise known as relational agency (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2008).

By acknowledging the oral (intangible) aspect of Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islanders knowledge and history, the curators enacted joint principles concerning the purpose of exhibiting social, cultural, and historical diversities of the Indigenous Australian communities. Through their considerations and collaborative actions, the curators emphasized the importance of seeing and understanding the world by listening to multiple voices. Thus, the curators chose a multi-voiced social language rather than a monophonic national one.

### **Case II: Exhibited Identities**

*“I still get emotional to think that my story meant something.”<sup>4</sup>*

These words belong to Dianne Clayton whose story is told through the artwork of her daughter Peta Edwards. Art that began as a final for a school project ended up being an addition to the *First Australians* gallery. *The title of the artwork is Can you Imagine? (Mum's story):* it is the story of one member of the Stolen Generations. It is a story of one person, yet it relates to many: such is the power of art, images, words, and personal history. Peta's artwork was exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and in regional galleries as part of ArtExpress in 2001(McNaught, 2010). The National Museum of Australia acquired it in 2008

(Fig. 3). Pip McNaught, an assistant curator of the gallery wrote, "ripples of knowledge from this one artwork go out from one family to visitors of an exhibition of student art, to a national museum" (McNaught, 2010, p.18). The Director of Gallery of *First Australians at the time*, Michael Pickering, placed the artwork in a broader context:

*The events represented in Peta's work are the experiences that shaped our history—the legacy of the Stolen Generations. Works such as Peta's tell stories or history, of personal experiences, and events that shaped the lives of individuals and society. They remind us that the artifact does not, in itself, make history—history, sacred and secular is made, is experienced and told by people" (in Vero, 2008, p. 23).*

Pickering's comment echoes the sentiments of the curators interviewed who conveyed it was the narratives provided by the source community that dictated what objects from the collection were chosen, and not the other way around (in the interview, 2012).



Figure 3: Link-Up Exhibit. Photo used with permission of the NMA, image by A.J. Cole, 2012.

In addition to Peta's artwork the exhibit provides several other personal stories, which follow information about the grassroots Link-Up organization (Fig. 3). Several caseworkers from the organization visited the exhibit in 2008 and commented the stories increase awareness and provide education to a wider community, which makes their jobs "that much easier" (Poulson, 2008, p. 20).

The exhibit, Link-Up: Bringing Them Home opened in 2008 and is located in the lower gallery in an area made up of several smaller exhibitions opposite the temporary exhibition space. The exhibition space envelops a small area featuring several personal stories from the history of "The Stolen Generations." Using the Link Up Organization as the framework for the exhibition provides both a tool to inform the public of their work and a link to people who have been affected by what happened to the Stolen Generations, such as those whose stories are told in the individual exhibits. The exhibits take a step forward to minimize Indigenous Australians as a collective group and create individual identities through the stories told. To better understand the importance of the Link-up organization, Peta's artwork, and the narratives of the Stolen Generations within Australia's history, we provide a brief historical context.

### Acts of Protection

As early as 1837 the British Select Committee recommended that a "Protector of Aborigines" to be appointed in Australia. Thirty-two years later in 1869 the Aborigines Protection Act (Victoria) established a Protection Board that allowed the governor to forcibly remove any Aboriginal child and place them in a reformatory or industrial school (Human Rights, 2015). In 1905 The Aborigines Act (Western Australia) was passed, and the Chief Protector became the legal guardian of "every Aboriginal and half-caste child under 16" (Human Rights, 2015, n.p.). Other territories enacted similar laws shortly after that. In 1969, all states repealed the legislation (Human Rights, 2015). However, in 1909, in accordance with South Australia's Protector of Aborigines, "children were to be prevented from acquiring the customs of the Aborigines," and in New South Wales (NSW) the protector stated "the young people will merge into the present civilization and become *worthy citizens*" (BTHR, 1997, italics added).

In 1980 the first Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation was established in New South Wales (NSW) to provide support services, tracing and reuniting children removed from their families. The work of Link-Up creates "bridges" to return people to their "belonging place" (Link-Up, n d.), and has many offices throughout Australia.

In August 1995, the Commonwealth government established a *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. The outcome was the *Bringing Them Home* report presented in 1997 that identified and preserved records of the people affected by the period of the Stolen Generations (Human Rights, 2015).

## Bringing Them Home Report

According to the *Bringing Them Home Report* (BTHR, 1997), the Stolen Generations was the name given to the 100,000 plus Aboriginal Australian children who were forcibly removed from their families by police or welfare officers between 1910 and 1970 as stipulated by Australian Federal and State agencies. The government's action of forced removal of Aboriginal Australian children has been interpreted as an opportunity to provide them with the education needed to help them assimilate into the dominant culture (BTHR, 1997): It was a culture they neither wanted nor understood. Instead, their removal from their family (community) - the people and place they called home - stripped them of their cultural identity.

The BTHR reports a high incidence of child abuse took place in many of the foster homes or orphanages (BTHR, 1997; Koruff, 2006). The *Bringing Them Home* report (BTHR, 1997) provides quotes from those who were separated from their families. Many talk about a *loss of identity*, "our identity is where we come from and who we are": *languages taken away*, "It was forbidden for us to talk in our own language. If we had we would have been able to retain it: and *loss of cultural identity*" (BTHR, 1997).

## The Apology

On February 13, 2008, that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave his "we say sorry" speech to the Australian House of Representatives suggesting a "future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility" (Apology Speech, 2008, p.167). Rudd specifically addressed the Stolen Generations:

*I am sorry. On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry . . . We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied. We offer apology to the mothers, fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments. In making this apology, I would also like to speak personally to the members of the stolen generations and their families . . . from Yuendumu, the central west of the Northern Territory, to Yabara, in North Queensland, and to Pitjantjatjara in South Australia . . . (p. 169-170).*

Despite this apology, a report in the *Telegraph* in January of 2009, stated that there were still "more than 4,500 Australian Aboriginal children in state care in New South Wales" (NSW), which "is a far higher number as compared to the 1,000 children in foster homes and church run-mission when the removal policy ended in

1969” (Malkin, 2009, n.p.). The report states that this exceeds the number during the timeframe of the Stolen Generations in the territory (Malkin, 2009).

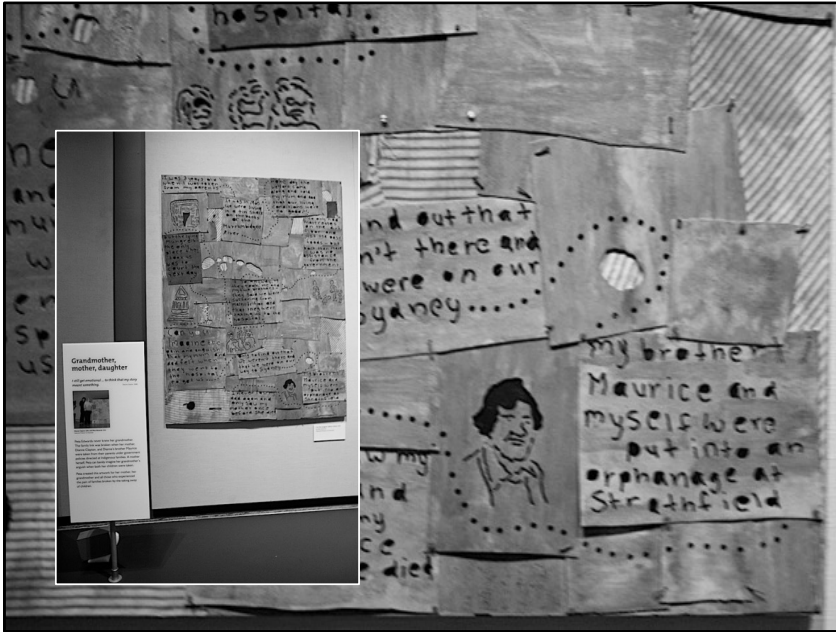


Figure 4: Close-up of Peta's artwork, insert shows the overall display. Photo used with permission of the NMA, image by A.J. Cole 2012.

### One Family's Narrative

Telling the narratives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples is a consistent thread through the *First Australians* galleries. Diane's story is told through a large narrative painting that is reminiscent of a patchwork quilt (Fig. 4). In an interview with the *Lithgow Mercury*, Peta said, "this work is for her, for the hundreds of Indigenous Australians who share her pain" (Vero, 2008). The story of her mother's removal from her parents to an orphanage outside of Sydney as described on the 'quilt' follows (the series of six dots represent the dots Petra used to connect the story):

*I was three years old when I was taken from my parents . . . . . It was in 1965 we were living in a tin shack on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River . . . . . one day the welfare came and told my mum and dad that our living conditions were no good . . . . . We only had mattresses on the dirt floor and just the basic food-but back then there was no assistance from the government . . . . . so anyway they took me and my two brothers-they said we were suffering from malnutrition and they were taking us to the hospital . . . . . but the lying mungrels—the only*

*place they took us was to court the next day . . . . . Can you imagine the anguish my mum and dad felt when they went to the hospital to get us . . . . . only to find out that we weren't there and that we were on our way to Sydney . . . . . my brother Maurice and myself were put into an orphanage at Strathfield . . . . . I never saw my dad again and only saw my mother once before she died.*

After being removed from her mother and father, Dianne lived with a foster family. Even though she felt she was part of the family, she knew she was treated differently from the other children. She was turned out of the house when she was 18 years of age. Through the years, she was able to keep up with her brother Maurice but had no idea where her brother John was (McNaught, 2010).

The graphical narrative of the artwork seemingly has cultural elements implemented from Aboriginal Australian art. The punched-out quotes, images, and handprints become layers connected through a series of dots (Fig.4). The dots and layering effect used to connect the parts of the story are reminiscent of Aboriginal Australian *Papunya* paintings or perhaps represent a personal 'songline'; consequently, the handprints are similar to images found in Australian rock art. According to an Aboriginal Australian from the Kimberly region, handprints mark the area as owned by specific people (Issacs, 2007); thus, in this context the hands may represent Dianne's place during a specific time.

## Case II Summary

Peta's artwork provides a notion of agency. It explores issues of complications in identity formation and change. Vygotsky argues that agency informs the development of social movements and is of key importance in changing social conditions (Holland and Lachiotte, Jr., 2007). We showed how Peta's artwork provided agency not only for her family but also for other Indigenous Australians' to express and re-signify their history and identity; thus, it provided a means of self-determination.

The approach used in *the First Australians* galleries' for "telling the story of the people" (curators in the interview 2012) offers potentials for the curator to re-create their self-identities, along with their conceptual, cognitive, and affective "inner" worlds (Kress et al. 2001, p. 6). It also affords the same potentials to the source community and the museum. Kress et al. (2001) describes such processes as learning. This inherent learning refers to socially and culturally constructed worlds in which the Indigenous Australian's and their culture are recognized through *their* voices.

## Implications for Curatorial Practice and Change

Mediation that takes place within museum walls is complicated. National museums have the additional complexity knowing that the history of their collection was structured by "the prevailing philosophies of the collector's society" (Pickering, 2010, p. 81). Such a statement suggests that curators have the difficult job to mediate a balance between the museum's aims and incorporating the voice of the source community(s). While the curators may be the agents at the center of the meaning-making process, many other factors are present. Based on the curators interviewed at NMA, they deliberately focus on establishing lasting working relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. At the same time, they implement the policy of the museum's management, work with the challenges of the museum's physical environment (semiotic landscape), and listen to the voices of media and government officials. As Margaret Anderson (2011) suggests, courage by both museum directors and curators needs to be taken to make sure that museums can "reclaim a central role in both critiquing and celebrating the nation's memory" (para.8).

The curator's collaboration with various source communities affords personal narratives to understand the historical and cultural injustices of European settlers on Indigenous Australians during the period of the Stolen Generations. The inspiration for Peta's art illustrates the diverse voices that transform how one creates meaning from an exhibit such as *Link Up: Bringing Them Home*. Peta's artwork represents one such story told within the *First Australian* galleries. It provides a source of identity for her, her family, and then extends to other members of the Stolen Generations and those affected by it: Identity is provided through the mediation of remembering. Peta, knowingly or not, became a change agent, as did the curators and the museum by acknowledging her family's personal narrative.

The voices within the "semiotic landscape" of the museum were framed by emotive values, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders intangible cultural heritage was salient. In each exhibit, the personal narratives of source community members connected different aspects of the theme allowing for a broader and more emotive perspective of a particular part of Australia's history relating to *all* Australians. Emotive values were further established through the empowerment of the source community in presenting their stories; thus, in a broader sense this extends the museum's social role in combating inequality (Sandell, 2002). Furthermore, the exhibit provides an example of how artifacts, as a sign of communication formed by cultural and social processes, have the capacity to mediate knowledge within its semiotic landscape. In this way, the "landscape" of the exhibit provided the voice of not one, but of many through a single artwork. The curators interviewed communicated an understanding of the need to partner with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities to change the voice represented from that of the white majority to that of Australia's first peoples.



## In Conclusion

We believe, the curators interviewed are aware of their position as change agents in the process of being more inclusive while empowering the voice of Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders in developing exhibitions. In turn, their work influences the museum's national narrative and adds to the museum's moral agency (Marstine, 2011). Moral agency implies that narratives within the exhibits need to provoke thought, to inform, and when necessary uncover what hides under the carpet. We suggest, re-contextualizing actions are central to the promotion of social responsibility (Sandell, 2002; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007) and tied to how the museums represent, reproduce culture, and create self-identities.

## Endnotes

1. The term Indigenous Australians refers collectively to Indigenous Tasmanians, Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal Australian peoples: each group has numerous communities with a distinct cultural culture and history unto itself; thus, the use of plural terminology. According to several Australian Universities, cultural programs acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with terms such as Aborigines, Aboriginal, The Aborigines are considered inappropriate, as are the terms used in lower case letters which place worldwide identity on the terms. Currently, accepted terminology is Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the use of Aboriginal as an adjective, for example, Aboriginal people, art, or culture. The most appropriate naming is by identification of the specific community where the person is from. The present authors are not responsible for any terminology or abbreviations used by the museum in publications, the curators interviewed, or any other sources quoted that incorrectly name Indigenous Australians.
2. The process of the adopting DRIP began in the early 1970s through advocacy by Indigenous peoples worldwide. Four countries initially did not accept the agreement, Australia, United States, New Zealand and Canada (all colonized countries of Great Britain). Australia accepted two years (2009) later followed by the other three one year later in 2010. A PDF of the Declaration can be found at this link; [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)
3. In 1967 The Councillor for Aboriginal Affairs began collecting works of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders art. In 1990 after many transitions became The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission (ATSIC). The *ATSIC Amendment Bill* repealed provisions of the ATSIC Act and abolished the ATSIC councils, which ceased operation in June of 2005 (Pratt and Bennett, 2004).
4. Quote from 2004 on the exhibit's signage.

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## **ARTICLE 3**

## OVERVIEW FOR ARTICLE 3

**Title:** National Museum's Representation of Rock Art: Beyond Fieldwork and Documentation

**Author:** Anne Jodon Cole, Aalborg University, Denmark Institute of Learning and Philosophy, Centre for Design, Learning and Innovation. (100%).

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**Presented:** 09 October 2015

**Audience:** researchers within archaeology, cultural heritage, and museology

**Abstract / Summary:** New Museology highlights a need for museums to be more socially responsible and tackle global issues. In this paper the author evaluates the representation of rock art in three national museums (Canberra, Australia; Cape Town, South Africa, and Wellington, New Zealand). Rock art is priceless cultural heritage that goes beyond fieldwork and documentation. It provides an opportunity for museums to fortify and promote the cultural heritage of its Indigenous peoples through working with them as partners in the narratives told by the museum. It also provides a means to discuss issues related to detrimental effects of societal infrastructure (roads, mining, rails, housing), human desecration, and the effects of climate change on both rock art and Indigenous communities. However, only one of the three museums provided any form of a comprehensive narrative. Museums have an opportunity to provide a diachronic narrative between ancient images and contemporary concerns related to them. It calls for museums to provide exhibitions that prompt as many questions as they hope to answer—where creating tension and provocation denote positive actions.

**Aim & Background:** Rock art provides the longest diachronic form of communication known to humankind, yet representation of it in a national museum context is either limited or missing. Focus was placed on the museum (and curators) role of providing narratives that promote social justice and provide accurate history of the Indigenous peoples living within the nations boundaries.

**Method:** Interviews and follow-up questionnaires with the curators provided the framework for the research. Content analysis of the data first on the individual museum and then as a cross comparison between the different museums was used to understand what voices influenced representation and the narratives provided.

**Findings & Conclusion:** New museology suggests museums take on global issues, and national museums have a specific role to play. Rock art provides an opportunity to discuss many issues beyond archaeology, deterioration of rock art due to mining and developing infrastructure, human and feral desecration. The involvement of the source communities can add a voice to rock arts cultural importance and its continuance as a form of communication.



## NATIONAL MUSEUM'S REPRESENTATION OF ROCK ART: BEYOND FIELDWORK AND DOCUMENTATION

Spanning more than thirty thousand years and consisting of millions of images worldwide, rock art constitutes a large portion of humankind's cultural expressions from pre-history to more modern times. It is "priceless heritage" that is increasing more and more vulnerable to becoming "endangered" (Bertilsson, 2004:89). Yet, as one of humanity's most valuable cultural heritage resources its representation seems to be ignored as a topic of discussion in national museums. How is it that such a diachronic archive of history so fundamental to the World Heritage of humankind escapes the mindsets of curatorial teams? How can such an important cultural aspect of Indigenous Peoples<sup>1</sup> be overlooked as part of the national narrative?

This article reviews the representation of rock art at three national museums: (National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia; Wellington, National Museum of New Zealand *Te Papa Tongawara*, Wellington; and Iziko South African Museum, Cape Town, South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Focus is placed on national museums as they have a key role *and* social responsibility to present accurate and complete narratives of the nations history, which includes history regarding its indigenous peoples. This investigation is based on empirical research, along with semi-formal interviews and follow-up questionnaires carried out between 2012 and 2015 with curators from each museum.

### Historical summary of national museums & role in social responsibility

Museums began in Ancient Greece as institutes of philosophy and contemplation, evolving into collections of the royalty and the church in the Middle Ages, to *Wunderkammer* during the Age of Enlightenment (1650s-1780s), and into new museology today suggesting museums should play a larger role in education, increase revenue, and be inclusive of the communities they serve. Despite this, writings on the representation of indigenous peoples in museums (cf.; Sandell, 2003; Bennett, 2004; Coombes, 2004; McCarthy, 2007) suggest the construct during the Age of Enlightenment centered on national culture where certain cultures under British colonialism were seen as 'primitive'. It would be great to say this has changed, but to say so could be construed as fabrication of the truth (cf., Sandell, 2003; Marstine, 2006). What then does it mean to be socially responsible and how does it relate to rock art? Simple. One of the leading authorities in museum research, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill specifies three dimensions museums need to incorporate (2007:1-2):

- The museum takes on a higher level of understanding the complex relationships between culture, communication, learning and identity in an attempt to approach a new audience;

- The promotion of a just society; and
- Social responsibility is tied into how they represent and reproduce culture and create self-identities.

While museums mission statement read as though this is happening, it has been suggested that many museums need to go back and “revisit them (*mission statements*) and ask why they are doing what they’re doing”? (Søndergaard & Janes, 2012: 26 italics added). Robert R. Janes, former Director and CEO of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, takes social responsibility one-step further, and suggests museums have a responsibility to tackle global issues (i.e., social disruption due to financial inequality, environmental issues, extinction of plant and animal life). “Museums *are* in a new position to invent a new future for themselves and their communities” (Janes, 2014:404). Social Responsibility is about accountability; it is about interconnectedness—the societal awareness of the connections between our own well-being, our families, the environment and humanity as a whole (Sandell & Janes, 2007:11). Telling the tough narratives can create tension within the museum and with its public. Museums have the opportunity to become bridges between the two cultures of humanities and the sciences (Janes, 2014), which could open up discussions in a means to ease into topics providing more accountable narratives.

Point one, put forth by Hooper-Greenhill, relates to Emmanuel Anati’s explanation that rock art “describes economic and social activities, ideas, beliefs, and practices and provides insights into the intellectual life and cultural patterns of man. Long before the invention of writing, rock art recorded the most ancient testimony of the human imaginative and artistic creativity. It constitutes one of the most significant aspects of common heritage of humanity” (1994:9). While there are others who suggest what rock art is, Anati’s description does several things, it doesn’t refer to it specifically as ‘art’, nor does it suggest that those who executed it were ‘artists’—what his explanation does is to establish its significance as ‘*common heritage for humanity*’.

Possibly this is the key message that seems missing from the representation of rock art in museums (points two and three of Hooper-Greenhill). It is the significance of “common heritage” that provides a means to encompass not only past and present histories but also future histories that concern current social issues. These social issues include the deterioration of rock art due to weathering (increasing effects of climate change), industrial development (including mining & building of dams, loss of land use by indigenous peoples), wars (i.e., cultural heritage destruction by Isis), as well as mistreatment by humans and animals. Additionally, it would provide opportunities to open dialogue on cultural identities that could further the museums social obligations.

The presentation of rock art in a museum setting is no simple manner. The combination of it being both tangible and intangible heritage creates complex nuances that intertwine aspects of in culture, communication, and identity. For many of the existing descendants there is the spiritual and cultural connection to beliefs passed down orally through the generations. This becomes an important ‘other way of knowing’ that is not something indigenous peoples often share fully with Westerners; oral knowledge systems connect indigenous peoples with a sacred manner of knowing (MacMaster and Trafzer, 2008). The Māori have the term, ‘*taonga*’ meaning treasure—something that is to be protected and handed down through the generations (*whakapapa*) where the belief is that every human is connected to the natural environment: many treasures are believed to be living entities, a belief shared with other indigenous cultures. Such knowledge systems “reflect and draw connections between ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants” (Kearny, 2009:210).

Therefore, how can museums incorporate this form of knowledge in their research and exhibitions, especially if there are no indigenous people on their staff or solicited only as part-time consultants? Rock art could provide an exciting way of conveying some of these important aspects of history, yet the majority of museums in this study show its role has so far, been silenced.

### **Current applications of rock art in national context**

I will *briefly* describe the presentation of rock art at the various museums in this study. The journey begins down under in Canberra, Australia and moves east through the southern hemisphere to New Zealand and South Africa. Two of these countries contain thousands, if not millions of rock art images. Sites in New Zealand are quite young compared with the amount of sites limited in comparison to the other two countries. However, the significance of the images still provide symbolic ties to ancestors, creation stories, and the land despite the attempts of assimilation through the colonization by Europeans over the last several hundred years; something shared by Māori, Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders, and San / Khokhoi descendants.

#### *National Museum Australia, Canberra (NMA)*

Located on land belonging to the Nugunnawal and Ngambri (native people of Canberra) and within view of the Parliament building the museum sits prominently on the tip of Acton peninsula overlooking Lake Burley Griffin. *The First Australians*: Gallery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Peoples is located on two levels at the end of the museum complex. The intention of the Upper gallery is to show you “the diversity and connectedness, more culture than history” (NMA curator interview, 2012), while the lower level “emphasise the effects of colonisation ...since the British arrived in 1788”(NMA website).

The rock art exhibit, *Since Time Immortal; Central Australia*, is located on the upper level where a curved focal point designed to bring you into the area (NMA curator interview, 2012) actuality seems to suggest you continue into the remaining exhibits on the upper level instead of the rock art exhibit.<sup>3</sup> The small exhibit consists of three walls reflecting the earthy colors of the outback (Fig. 1); the salient image within the exhibit is a reproduction of a rock carving depicting the travels of *Kwekatye* (young uninitiated boys) found in the Napwerte Ewaninga rock art reserve, south of Alice Springs (NMA exhibit signage). Small signage on one side of the engraving explains today's Aboriginal artists "use the same symbols referring to creation stories and ceremonies" only using different means and that "10,000 years ago *artists* turned parts of Central Australia into *galleries of rock art*"; such terminology provides an example of Eurocentric bias (*italics added by author*). A quote on the wall, attributed to Kevin Gilbert (it is assumed he is/was an Australian Aboriginal man) suggest it is much more:

*This is not just for the old culture. This is for goin' forward. . It's not going back to the 'Stone Age', it's flowing our soul back to the Beginning, the Dreaming, being one with the Presence of the undying spirit.*

The wall on the other side of the reproduction provides a small landscape photograph and signage explaining how knowledge is passed down through the generations, from an Australian Aboriginal viewpoint. An enormous two-sided glass exhibit of 10,000-year-old boomerangs dwarfs an accompanying photograph of a rock art painting depicting men with boomerangs. Further into the gallery, an exhibit on Tasmania provided a glimpse of rock art carving via sepia toned image on the exhibit's back wall: a small placard in the center of the exhibit provided dating and a location.<sup>4</sup>

Although disappointing, the lack of images and information is not surprising given one of the curators interviewed stated he "knew little about rock art" (NMA curator interview 2012). With so much rock art in Australia and with two large areas under protection as World Heritage sites, I fail to see how such a small exhibit conveys "diversity and connectedness" or provides much historical or cultural content regarding its place within the national history of Australia. What about the missed opportunities to discuss tougher issues that may cause too much political tension: mining companies, development of infrastructure on territorial land that disrupts rock art sites and other aspects of Australian Aboriginal heritage.<sup>5</sup>

### ***National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa)***

Te Papa is prominently situated on Wellington's waterfront. The building was designed to incorporate biculturalism of the country. The fourth floor holds the Māori

galleries located on the harbor (natural) side while the pākehā (European) galleries are situated towards the city center (urban). The museum prides itself on celebrating moments of national unity, yet often omits “darker aspects of the country’s history for narrative that foster pride in bicultural identity” (Alivizatou, 2012:50). Biculturalism “permeates” through all levels of the museum guiding its practices, cultural principals and its approach to intangible heritage (Alivizatou, 2012:51). It is something that is immediately visible through its different methods of exhibition and incorporation of Māori culture.

New Zealand rock art is young compared to other areas in the world. It is believed to be between 839 to 1000 years old (Te Papa curator interview, 2012). Most of the rock art is located in central portion of the South Island not far from Timaru. However, its presence in the museum is understated. At the time of my visit to Te Papa in 2012, I viewed two indicators pointing to the importance of rock art to the Māori. The first was an artistic interpretation by a Māori artist of large sinuous contemporary wooden carving of a bird like creature extending over the length of the entrance to the Māori galleries (Fig.2). While it is the only image of rock art present, the Māori curator reaffirmed a wish to incorporate more of it in the future, “it is becoming more and more important, I don’t really think it has been given its due. . . it has been hidden away . . .down south we are definitely reconnecting more”(ibid). A second example was found in a nearby exhibit on the Moriori iwi of the Chatham Islands where a large black and white photograph of rock art dominates the exhibits’ background. The same exhibit provides examples of bark art, which are not normally found in Polynesia.

With the current lack of rock art, I asked the curator what his vision of a rock art exhibit might entail. His first concern in such an exhibition was “to allow *tangata whenua* (people of the land) from the local rock art localities to talk about their special relationship to rock art” (follow-up correspondence, 2015). According to Māori cultural values local people are culturally obliged to fill the role of *kaitiaki*, guardians, of the ancient treasures within their lands. It was key for the curator that “visitors to the exhibition would gain understanding of the “enduring cultural potency of rock art and understand Māori culture is still very much alive and vibrant. They will understand that Māori remain intimately associated with their ancestral treasures. The exhibit would perhaps provide a film where the guardians are speaking which in turn confirms their *mana*, reputation, within their own people and the wider Maori community” (ibid.). As curator he would want to see various layers of scholarly analysis outlining the “position of rock art within the continuum of Maori artistic practice. Perhaps look at different stylistic difference between tribal areas and links to wider Polynesian rock art tradition”(ibid.). From a cultural heritage standpoint, the last point would provide linkage from Easter Island to Hawaii and all the areas in between; something not easy to do but important in showing the connectedness of humankind.

When asked about the value of rock art to Maori, the curator conveyed there has been a “loss of transmission of that language—we see extinct species of birds, such as the moa and we can see sailing ships, so there has been a continuum right down to first contact with early Europeans” (Te Papa curator interview, 2012). He continued:

*Because of the loss of land, the loss of traditional way of life people moved onto small reservations as you may call them, their whole way of life ceased with rock art being taken over by farmers, land runners, sheep farmers and so forth. So today we can use a lot of theories but it is something that is still a great taonga- a treasure, and we, I guess are always reinterpreting the figures. There is a line of figures (referring to a specific rock art site) and they are all touching hands and arms, today that symbolize whakakotahi, which is togetherness, there is a link back to the ancestors. It is a modern interpretation but it still has meaning.*

Thus, despite not having an exhibit on rock art or incorporating it somehow there is ongoing knowledge, concern, and interest in it as taonga. The curator reference to darker parts of New Zealand’s past—perhaps, rock art provides an opportunity to easing into such narratives.

### ***Iziko South African Museum (ISAM), Cape Town***

The permanent exhibit !Q-The Power of Rock Art opened in 2003. The exhibit is based on the works of ethnologists Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd and the prevailing theories of shamanism and neuropsychological. Leading rock art researchers provided consultation, while Jeanette Deacon was specialist consultant under the curatorial with Carol Kaufmann as project manager (exhibit signage). They worked together with numerous members of San associations, councils, and organized cultural centers (exhibit signage).

The introduction to the exhibit states, “spiritual beliefs give paintings and engraving their power”, that “rock art must be revealed through perspective of the artist”, and “heritage continues to inspire us”. The exhibit was designed to answer questions such as, Who are the artists? How old is the traditions? How are they made? What do they mean? (exhibit signage). Answers are provided in several themes that are explored, The Spirit World, Rain making, and Healing, all reflecting a San perspective. The exhibits introduction includes an explanation of the choice of two San images from the Linton panel being used in the national coat of arms (without mentioning their change from religious images to political ones).<sup>6</sup> Further into the exhibit the panels dominant one wall. Historical accounts move from placing African rock art in context via a large map of the continent and with the a copy of the Blombos ochre carving dated to approx. 80,000 years ago; thus, the

context of humankind's migration out of Africa. In an interview in 2012 at the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI), Dr. Benjamin Smith, referred to the migration out of Africa as often causing tension:

*(The San) . . . , like the Aboriginals in Australia, are one of the communities on earth who can chart their position back in space a remarkably long way and take pride in a very ancient heritage without somehow suggesting that they are in any way more privilege or special than anyone else or any different...that we are biologically identical...I think that is one of the biggest tensions in the museum(Origins Centre).*

Tensions are not necessarily a bad thing. They prompt a person to consider alternative modes of thinking about ideas- often questioning existing constructs, in other words, exhibits creating tension act as mediators between museums stakeholders, curators, its visitors, and the local/national communities its serves.

Content from interviews and follow-up questions showed ISAMs collaboration with descendants of the creators of the original rock art was the top priority for all involved. Jeanette Deacon recalled having 20 representatives of San groups attend the planning meeting and a few more participating in the opening ceremony (response to questionnaire, 2015). She stated, “the entire curatorial team were conscious of the need to inform San communities of our intention . . .but they live 800 km away and it was seldom possible to raise sufficient funding for detailed consultation” (ibid). Financial restraints and distance for indigenous communities to travel are realistic concerns and constraints for any museum and need to be incorporated into planning. In some instances, such as at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, museum practitioners and indigenous partners decided to meet in a neutral meeting place midway between the museum and the community (cf. Conaty & Carter, 2005).

Such collaboration creates exhibits designed “around an indigenous voice”(Smith in follow-up, 2015) and generates pride in their heritage while bringing “authenticity to the exhibition”(Deacon, response to questionnaire, 2015). It would be great to assume this is always the case with museums; however, it is not. Historian Ciraj Rassool who was a member of the consulting team implied that even though San descendants were involved in the planning, there is no discussion of the ‘blood and brutality of the Khoisan experience’ with colonists (2010:12). But if this was his attitude to what degree did he voice his concerns?

Through a combination of artifacts and various forms of documentation the ISAM exhibit places rock art within cultural context of the San, which includes large landscape murals. Landscape is no easy matter to incorporate. Speaking on the

topic at the Origins Centre, Geoff Blundell, its former Director and curator commented that in his mind authenticity could not take place. Geoff commented, “You are trying to take an experience and replicate it. You can’t. That is not the idea. What we were trying to bring across is the *essence* of a landscape more than trying to create the land surrounding the site” (interview, 2012). I think for the most part ISAM succeeded as much as photo images allow.

The ISAM exhibit has been on display for twelve years. When asked what he would do to refresh the exhibit, Sven Ouzman, former ISAM Curator of Archaeology suggested the Bushman dioramas could be a means to open up and combine the two exhibitions in a more informed manner; much like Janes suggestion of bridging humanities with science. A means of bridging in this case would come from the addition of a more contextual background that would depict the two black men who did most of the work removing the Linton Panels while their white supervisor stood by. The supervisor was the one who received the most recognition in the historical record and was also paid substantially more (Ouzman follow-up 2015).

According to Ouzman, other issues relevant to ISAMs being more social responsibility centered around “admittance fees are to high” for most local people as most “visitors are international” not from South Africa or other areas of African continent. For South Africans the museum still retains its “authoritative place” where “information is transferred via text and objects to a population that is “functionally text- illiterate” and “in post Apartied South Africa some people perceive the museum as part of the government they consider to be increasingly out of touch with ordinary people” (follow-up, 2015). There is no denying that government has a strong presence as the museum and its formal façade are in the close proximity of the South African Parliament.

### **Creating change and working together**

New museology highlights the need for museum to be more socially responsible and tackle global issues. National museums should embrace their position in providing such narratives. Rock art provides an opportunity to discuss and prompt questions regarding the evolution of humankind’s cognitive and creative abilities, effects of colonialism on both Indigenous peoples and their cultural heritage, deterioration of rock art due to industrialism, human desecration, and climatic changes. Rock art provides opportunity to have Indigenous peoples and museum practioners (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) join together in all phases of planning, implementing, opening celebrations and closing ceremonies- without native knowledge, assuredly only part of the message is presented.

From the museums visited as part of this PhD research, I am troubled at the lack of narrative around this important and valuable part of humankind’s joint



cultural heritage. All of the museums in this study stated they incorporate ICOMS code of ethics. As ICOM falls under UNESCO, and as World Heritage Organization falls under UNESCO, I suggest there could be more collaboration between museum practitioners and these parties—as all are stakeholders in this priceless heritage of humankind. The more informed the exhibit, the more informed the general public is about rock art and culture surrounding it, the more awareness there could be to the interconnectedness of humankind. Tension is needed in museums; people should be jolted into thinking anew and not just saunter by exhibits. Exhibits should prompt as many questions as they answer, only then are they educating and being socially responsible.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is understood by the author that the term ‘indigenous’ is problematic, as it tends to collectivize many distinct populations who have experiences under imperialism. Terms such as Native Americans, Aboriginal, Māori, San, KhoiSan also provide collective labels. Ideally, specific tribal names should be used. In South Africa, the concept of San being ‘First’ is incorrect as it depends on which specific area of the country is discussed. Some would counter to some degree we are all indigenous.

<sup>2</sup> A focus on rock art in national museums was parallel study to PhD research on curators’ representation of indigenous peoples in a national museum context. Originally the entire focus was on representation of rock art in this context, but after visiting both Te Papa and the NMA it was realized there was not enough information to work with; thus, the focus turned to what degree are indigenous peoples marginalized within museums and museums role regarding social responsibility. The National Museum of the American Indian, part of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. was part of the research, but it was left out of this article as there was no presentation of rock art per se, except as symbols etched on the entrance doors. One of the curators (a Native American) suggested in an interview that they were “thinking of incorporating rock art in upcoming exhibition”, but in follow-up stated he “knew nothing about it.” It is too bad since the museum covers Native Americans from northern Canada to the tip of Tierra Del Fuego: a great opportunity that at this point in time seems missed.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the exhibit is so small and nondescript that correspondence with a leading South African rock art researcher suggested he/she was surprised at the lack of any rock art in the gallery!

<sup>4</sup> In 2010-11 Tasmanian Aboriginals camped out at a disputed site north of Hobart to protest the building a 70m high bypass over a heritage site containing 42,000-year-old artifacts over the course many Aboriginal protesters were arrested. Despite their attempts to save the area, the government offered them land on either side of the overpass and finally passed legislation that approved its being built. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-04-21/aborigines-call-off-bypass-protests/2607788>

<sup>5</sup> further information on geophysical damage to rock art in Australia: Bednarik, R.(2014) Development and rock art. Auranet <http://www.ifrao.com/development-and-rock-art/>

<sup>6</sup> for further information: Smith, B., Lewis-Williams, J.D., Blundell, G., Chippindale, C. (2000). Archaeology and symbolism in the new South African coat of arms, *Antiquity*, vol. 74: 285. P. 467.

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*Note: There are no images in this article, as the respective parties had not granted permission by the time of submission to the symposium and for publication.*

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## CHAPTER 7: CROSS-COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

*. . . written history does not present a dialogue so much as a static record of an authority's singular recounting of a series of events. As readers, we may interpret these writings, but the writing itself remains the same. Oral narratives, on the other hand, do not have to be told exactly the same way—what is fundamental is whether or not they carry the same message.<sup>1</sup>*

Western and Indigenous knowledge and values differ (Grieves, 2009). While there is nothing new in stating this, it has ramifications for new museology and the way a curator presents or represents Indigenous cultures. Western culture values the written word over oral histories, yet oral traditions provide a wealth of traditional knowledge for Indigenous societies. Whereas the written word is conveyed through the voice of one person, oral traditions are communal connecting a listener and a speaker in an experience that links the past and present—no one person can lay claim to an entire oral history (Hansen, 2005). The implications of the three case studies and the two parallel studies center on the value of the intangible cultural heritage of oral narratives as a means of providing a *voice* for those who have been silenced far too long.

The cross-comparative analysis answers the aim of the research and the related questions through three themes that became salient in the case studies. A discussion of the themes is provided in the first three sections of this chapter: (1) influence of *governing body*; (2) differences in *curatorial approaches*, and (3) curators involvement with *source communities*. These themes relate as much to the museum's semiotic landscape as they do to its social landscape. Similar themes developed in the parallel studies on Toy museums (Article One) and on the representation of rock art in a national museum context (Article Three). The findings from the articles will be included in the discussion as applicable.

Section Four narrows the three themes down to one: *Whose Voice?* The visual grammar of the compositional systems of a museum's semiotic landscape are used to understand the "cultural and social valuations" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p.35) placed on the semiotic resources used in the building's architecture and the curated exhibitions. The social landscape (CHAT) provided a lens to understand how the social language of each "as-if" figured world (Holland et. al., 1998) shaped identities, agency, and shared relational expertise. Combined these theories provided insight on the different voices that influence a curator's process of

representing the nations' Indigenous peoples. The final section *Implications and Moving Forward* concludes the chapter.

## 7.1 THE INFLUENCE OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Who has the power to create, to make visible, and to legitimize meanings and values? This is the question posited by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000a). Cultural politics, she stated, center on issues of “ethics and morality, sociological questions of exclusion and inclusion, advantage and disadvantage” all of which have relevance for national museums (p. 19). In this light, she sees museums having the power to make a difference: if the terminology used by the museum's board in its policy and mission statements excludes marginalized communities, the curator's need to step up and challenge the ethics of the museum as an social and cultural institution.

The second research question (RQ2) seeks to examine the terminology used in governing acts and museum policy and whether they influence a curator's meaning making process. The following discussion provides a means to answer the question.

The value of the museum's policy and mission statements became salient after analyzing the transcribed interviews of several curators.<sup>7</sup> There were noticeable similarities in the social language used by each curator to describe how they worked with source communities *and* how their museum addressed inclusiveness in its mission statement and policy. Thus, the terminology used by governing body seemed to parallel the social language used by the curators in the interviews and how he or she worked with the source communities.

The findings of this thesis imply that if the governing body of a museum is hand picked by political appointments, the mission statement and policies it develops parallels the national agenda. This, in turn, points to the social language used by museum's practioners as being a signifier of the museum's moral agency (Marstine, 2011) and what narratives of “nation” are presented. The tone of the mission and policy create the environment for how a source community is involved in the representation of their culture and history. Thus, in addition to RQ2 the aim and other research questions (RQ1, RQ3, and RQ4) also began to be answered.

Based on the analysis of the museum's semiotic and social landscape this section is divided into three sub-headings; master identities, setting the tone, and reflection of a nation.

### 7.1.1 MASTER IDENTITIES (RQ2)

The museum board's inception of policy should follow the guidelines specified by The International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics for Museums (2013) that states "exhibitions to be in accordance with the stated *mission, policy, and purpose of the museum*" (Section 4.1. italics added). Thus, the terminology used in museum policies provides reflection on the museum as places where "*master identities*" are created (Hooper-Greenhill (2000a), and in the context of "national" museums as agents of social change. If *inclusive* terminology is absent from the mission statement and museum policies, how much *change* will be accomplished and what does it infer to museum practitioners and the source communities it serves? I suggest the terminology provides a valid consideration for the terms used in a museum's policy that suggest "labels" of who is included *and* who is not.

"Missions are the root of the New Museology," according to Ginsburgh and Mairesse (1997, p. 21), and concurs with the findings of this thesis. Based on my findings, I suggest the mission statement and policy need to address the museum's relationship with the nation's Indigenous peoples. This is grounded in the knowledge that museums are a foreign concept for Indigenous peoples (West and Cobb, 2005; Lonetree, 2012, Kovack, 2009); consequentially, providing inclusive terminology would begin a process of self-empowerment and breakdown the barrier of the museum as a master identity.

In viewing the various annual reports of each museum's governing body, the demographics of each museum's board seem to provide a link with the terminology used in the museum's mission and policy. In some instances, it also appeared to be consistent with the national agenda. Two governing bodies showed racial diversity (Te Papa and NMAI) while the NMA board, throughout the time of this research, had only one Aboriginal Australian man on it. This is in sharp contrast to NMAI's founding Act of Congress (1989) that stipulates 12 of the 23 board members are Native Americans. Similarly, Section 8c of the Public Act 1992 which established Te Papa, specifically states that the board shall:

*Endeavor to ensure that the museum expresses and recognizes the mana and significance of Maori, European and other major traditions and cultural heritages . . . provides a means for every such culture to contribute . . . to the museum's as a statement of New Zealand's identity.*

The wording found in Te Papa's policy refers to "biculturalism" and "partnership" and comments on the "unique position Māori hold in the museum" (Te Papa Annual Report 2013-14, p.16). What results from this is both NMAI and Te Papa have embraced the concept of new museology *and* raised their social capital (Janes and

Conaty, 2005) by incorporating bicultural terminology in the mission statement and the museum's policy.

### 7.1.2 SETTING THE TONE (RQ3)

A museum's annual report, which states its mission statement and policies, acts as a sleek marketing tool to draw in investors, inform its stakeholders, and update the public. Like many public and government documents, what is stated is not necessarily what actually occurs. This institutional angle places additional emphasis on questioning the intended meaning of the term "consultant" or "community partnership." Research question three (RQ3) concerns *how* an exhibition narrative is presented and who is the intended audience. Each of the three primary cases provided different views on curating methods with source community members: each one implicated that the wording of the mission statement and policy had some degree of influence.

The NMAI's mission states "advancing the knowledge of Native cultures of the Western 'hemisphere . . . the museum works to support the continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life" (NMAI website, 2015). Te Papa uses both Māori and English throughout the text in the museum, its website, and the annual report. Its mission statement states the museum shall "provide a forum . . . explore, and preserve both the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order to understand and treasure the past and to enrich the present . . ." (Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992). The terminology used at both museums suggests inclusivity and the value of traditional knowledge systems.

In contrast, during the interview at the National Museum of Australia (NMA) both curators spoke of working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as "consultants." Both felt it was crucial to present the community(s) voice *rather than* their own to the narratives presented. This is in line with The National Museum of Australia Act 1980 that indicates, "Aboriginal people are invited to explain . . .," yet it remains missing from the museum's mission. The NMA mission statement simply states, "The museum brings to life the rich and diverse stories of Australia through compelling objects, ideas and programs" (Annual Report 2014-2015, p.7). Terminology in the annual reports over the years consistently refers to curator's relationships with Indigenous Australians as *consultant*, which is in agreement with statements made by the curators in the interview. However, it is interesting that the NMAs terminology changed to *collaboration* or *partnerships* when the museum mentioned its work with other museums or universities. It is only *in such a context* that the wording becomes inclusive of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Several documents support further questioning of the terminology used by the NMA in its mission and policy. The NMA case study discussed questions concerning the employment of two Aboriginal women (one a former Director, the other former head of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island galleries). A second investigation uncovered an incident at the Australian of the Year ceremony. Adam Goode, an Australian footballer and Aboriginal man, received the distinction of the award in 2014. After Goode had finished his acceptance speech, the mostly non-Indigenous audience booed and jeered him<sup>2</sup>. Stan Grant, Indigenous Affairs editor for *The Guardian*, commented that for Aboriginals the booing, or "howls" were translated into "we are not welcomed" and said, "the Australian Dream is rooted in racism" (IQ<sup>2</sup>, 2015).

A similar instance for the disregard of Indigenous Australian people is discussed in Article Three wherein 2010-11 the government built a road in Tasmania over a heritage site containing artifacts over 42,000-years-old (Advertiser, 2012; Millman, 2014). Today, mining companies continue to build on Aboriginal land despite native title laws that should place limitations on building. As recently as October 2015, plans for the Carmichael coalmine (Queensland) were given the go ahead by the Queensland authorities to develop on the land of the Wangan and Jagalingou peoples. The coalmine will be Australia's largest despite a fight against it by the Aboriginal peoples who live here (Milman, 2015; Dept. of State Development, 2016). Although Queensland is not the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), it provides one more example of the how the government degrades the nation's environment and the cultural landscape of its Indigenous peoples. These examples are not isolated cases.

These instances suggest the NMAs governing body may need to ignore national mandates that are not inclusive to change the tone of the mission statement and policy. This said, the NMA has done more in recent years to be more inclusive, but the terminology of the mission and policy do not seem to coincide. Noting that government officials appoint many board members, recalls the statement, that the prominence of a national museum as being inclusive is "dependent on the degree of government control" (Janes 2007, p. 230). The need for museums to understand inclusivity is exemplified in the continuing concerns of discrimination of Indigenous Australian people; however, *the NMA is not alone* as recent news articles refer to similar instances in other areas in the world as well including, the United States, Canada, South America.

Richard Sandell (1998) posited, social inclusion is a *relational* issue, and in this instance relates to the breakdown between the museum as a public institution, represented by the governing body, and the source community. To answer RQ2 this suggests the narratives presented in exhibitions correlate with how much the source community is involved. It also points to whether the source community members feel they are included as part of the museum's audience. Global news at the end of

2016 suggests discrimination of minorities, gender preferences, and equal rights seem to be on the rise—making this research even more timely.

Section 7.1.1 and 7.1.2 suggest the social language used by a museum's governing body is explicit; therefore, it is not only a tool of manipulation but a "stimulus means" for the activity within the museum (Wertsch, 2007, p.180). It is from this that the social landscape of the museum is almost set. In *Reflection of Nation*, the affect of the terminology of the governing documents on the semiotic landscape and social landscape is discussed.

### 7.1.3 REFLECTION OF NATION (RQ4)

The fourth research question considers *what* narratives are presented, in this section it refers to national narratives. The issues mentioned above along with the findings from the case studies show a museum's position on inclusivity coincides with Ronan's (2014) comment that it is all too easy to sweep a nation's unpleasant history under the carpet and pretend it does not exist. The museum's political position seems to provide a direct link between the terminologies used, the involvement of source communities, and what narratives the architects and the curators choose.

Further political (and economic) influences of governing documents can be seen as the motivational context for the architects (political, economics, personal branding) whose buildings become signs (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Architecture creates an environment for the activities both inside and outside of the building, where the architects, planners, and the users culturally transform its semiotic landscape. The documentation for each museum revealed distinct differences of stipulations of the museum's design; thus, signifying political overtones from the outset. Additionally, political innuendos came from the placement of all three national museums in proximity to the country's Capitol building provides another context for the museum's relationship with *nation*. The location becomes a semiotic resource.

Of the three primary case studies, the NMAI set a precedent by being 'museum different' and involving Native Americans in all areas of the design planning and implementation. The museum carried out the mandate within the Public law that established by creating "a *living* memorial to Native Americans and their traditions" (Public Law 101-185, Sec. 3 b. USC 80q-1). The outcome is a museum that holds the voice of all who were involved in its creation, mostly Native Americans from various areas of the Western hemisphere. The NMAI's architecture and landscape explicitly reflects national and cultural symbolism as it relates to Native Americans values, while still welcoming anyone who enters (West, and Cobb 2005). The Director, W. Richard West suggested NMAI, as 'museum different' would incorporate "Indigenous museology."

The museum's physical environment provides the initial communication (Falk and Dierking, 2000) to whether the museum's agenda leans towards edutainment or education. Of the three primary case studies, the museum that signifies 'edutainment' is the National Museum of Australia (NMA) with its bright colors, contrasting materials, Uluru spiral, and playful Australian Garden of Dreams. The NMA blatantly follows in the abstract style of museum designs seen in Bilbao, Berlin, and New York (Reed, 2002). This is in alignment with the Pigott Report (1975) that called for the NMA to provide a space for "enjoyment and excitement" (p. 79), and an early design decision that placed the *First Australian* galleries at the furthest end.

Setting the Gallery of the First Australians at the end of the museum affects the amount of visitors who enter and the amount of information they absorb due their fading attention span (Falk and Dierking, 2000). In turn, this affects the methods used by the curatorial team to create exhibits that would draw the attention to the galleries. The placement of the NMA Indigenous galleries parallels terminology used in the mission statement and policy where "consultant" is preferred over "partner" regarding the source communities: both suggest the communities hierarchy and identity within the museum and national agenda. There is also the additional relational aspect that the curators nor the community was invited to participate in the design process as at the NMAI; the location, colors and abstract angles the curator's have to work with are issues out of their control (NMA curator in interview, 2012).

The architecture of Te Papa presents a lesser degree of edutainment. The energetic and interactive family exhibitions are located on the first level in combination with Bush City, an outdoor native environment space. Children can move freely among the many interactive exhibits. The political implications of the building's semiotic landscape can be seen in the placement of the Maori galleries. The curator at Te Papa along with other team members hinted that the location of the Maori galleries on the fourth level was not optimal for receiving high numbers of visitors (during interview, 2012). The fourth level does become somewhat of a destination point, but it offers a calmer and quieter atmosphere to consider the *Mana Whenua* gallery than the more energetic and interactive family friendly first level. Because of this, the upper-level location has the potential for the compositional systems of the galleries to be more coherent and provide more 'information value' due to its disconnect from the lower more active levels (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, van Leeuwen, 2005).

Unlike the NMA there is no *visual* disconnect from one exhibition area to another at Te Papa as a large open atrium connects the various levels. New Zealand's bicultural policy is incorporated on the fourth level where the Pākehā wing is situated on the urban side (front), and the Māori galleries are on the 'nature' side of the building looking out over Wellington harbor and surrounding hills. Although

this places the Māori galleries to the "back," it could be considered the "front" since it is the location of the men's formal entrance to the marae. The two sections are linked in the center by an exhibit on the Treaty of Waitangi in both English and Māori.

The parallel studies extend this discussion. The Toy Museum article (number one) provides two contrasting examples. One museum offers a casual laid-back exhibition in an old warehouse (*Lesksaksmuset*, in Stockholm, SE.), and the other a more formal historical context that takes into account the museum's historically theme (*Den Gamle By*, in Aarhus, DK). Likewise, The Iziko South African Museum (ISAM) in Cape Town captures the essence of more traditional museums. Its stoic Doric columns suggest it holds worldly possessions behind its façade, and it creates a sociocultural context for the rock art gallery inside a natural history museum. In various times rock art exhibitions have also been in the National Gallery, the Bertram House, and the Slave House, all located within the Iziko complex surrounding the Company Gardens within view of the Parliament building.

A museum's building, as a semiotic resource, provides a means to understand relational aspects between the social language of the governing body and the architectural design, how its layout influences curators, and what the meaning potential of the placement of the Indigenous galleries signifies to the communities represented. As a semiotic resource, the buildings physical space becomes a cultural tool for mediation between the various practices, or "figured worlds" (Holland et al., 1998).

#### 7.1.4 SUMMARY

The results show the policy set by the governing body and the acts that formulated the foundation for the museum influence several areas; (1) the demographics of the governing board; (2) the curator's "role" with source communities; and (3) the building's design. The terminology used by the museum's governing body and acting documents plays an important role in how and what narratives are reflected in its semiotic and social landscapes. Non-inclusive terminology reinstates the relationship Indigenous peoples have with museums where they have been part of the collected and exhibited (cf. Lonetree, 2012, Smith, 2012) and does not suggest they are part of the intended audience. To reiterate the message of Richard Sandell (2003) and Peter Stone (2005) museums have the ability to empower all people within the nation through clearly defining its purpose and principles related to social inclusion. It should begin with who is appointed to the governing body, and then the terminology used within its policies and mission statements. The social language used in Acts creating museums, mission statements, and museum policy can create boundaries between museums and how they respond to source communities. The findings of the cases convey Sandell's (2003) message that when

a museum to clearly defines its purpose and mission regarding inclusivity, it empowers itself and the communities it serves.

## 7.2 CURATORIAL APPROACHES

The second theme to emerge from the case studies was a difference in curatorial methods. Differences seem to be aligned with how each curator interpreted his or her relationship with the museum's policy and responsibility for exhibitions to represent the nation's Indigenous peoples accurately. This section discusses three segments: (1) A curator's role and audience, (2) The question of expertise, and (3) Indigenous or community curation. Thus, it touches on facets that will help answer the four research questions. Where applicable, the findings from the parallel studies (Articles One & Three) are woven in with the primary case studies.

### 7.2.1 THE CURATOR'S ROLE AND AUDIENCE

The first research question (RQ1) reflects on how a curator defines his or her role. In *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, Paul O'Neill (2012) suggested curatorship provides a frame that is "transformative" and one "of crossing over and between people, identities, and things, encouraging ideas to come to the fore in an emergent communicative process" (p.89). His statement emphasizes the distance between ICOM's (2009) definition of a curator as one who is in charge of all tasks related to the object in the collections-preservation, research, and communication (p.68) and the association of curator as expert. A number of the curators, I spoke with were more in line with the definition provided by O'Neill than ICOM.

Several curators interviewed saw the curator's role as a caretaker. Te Papa's curator, Hutoitoi, understood a component of his role was as "someone who works with *caring for* assemblages of cultural artifacts or cultural material and who specializes in knowing about those items . . ." (in follow-up questionnaire, 2015). A consulting curator involved with the rock art exhibit in South Africa defined her role as "one who *cares for objects* . . . and at the same time conveys the significance of the object/s to staff and visitors . . ." (Jeannette Deacon, 2015 in follow-up questionnaire). The notion of 'taking care' suggests a curator's role is part of a larger socio-cultural system and a social construct (Cash Cash, 2001) where curating becomes a cultural artifact (Kreps, 2003). Thus, it indicates the role of a curator's agency as a facilitator between the museum and the source communities they serve and represent. It extends their role to include social obligations and ethical responsibilities, including questioning museum policy that is not inclusive. Additionally, for Hutoitoi it connects back to the museum's policy (*mana taonga*

and Mātauranga Maori). For Dr. Deacon (ISAM), Sven Ouzman (ISAM), Benjamin Smith (RARI) and Christina Kreps to their backgrounds in archaeology or anthropology.

The third research question (RQ3) considers who is considered the curator's intended audience. Most of the museums, in this research, directed their exhibitions towards a general national and then international audience. Only one curator suggested the exhibition was developed with another audience in mind. Hutoitōi explicitly stated the exhibits at Te Papa were designed "first and foremost" for the people being represented (in interview, 2012). During the interview, he stated, "If it doesn't work for a Māori audience, without question it isn't good enough." Of the three primary cases, the interview and follow-up with Hutoitōi conveyed the broadest meaning of the term *partnership* with the source community, as both parties were actively involved together through the entire process. Smith, the curator at the NMAI, suggested that while many Native Americans visit the museum the overall audience is non-Native (in interview, 2013); thus, the curators had to consider narratives for the diverse audience the Smithsonian Institution attracts.

The curators who participated in the research on toy museums both developed the exhibitions for adults, with one was specifically designed for adult toy collectors—*neither* planned with children in mind. As in the primary case studies, the audiences were designated by the museum's agenda, and this was reflected in the social language presented by the curators whose museum agenda supported *partnership* over *consultation*. In these instances, the exhibition narratives often provided a higher level of meaning for the intended audience than to those whose cultural artifacts were represented. Implications of this are discussed in section 7.3.

In concluding this section, I refer back to figure 3.1, which places the figured world of the curator as the subject, the exhibition space as *mediating artifact*, and the *object* as the representation of the source community. The triangle can now be understood through the relational aspects between the museum's agenda, how a curator understands his or her role, and to how the source community is involved its own representation. Due to the various influences, such as the semiotic landscape of the physical building, and the social landscape developed by the governing body, the complexities of the curator's role have become more salient. The outcome of the object, an exhibition that accurately represents the nation's Indigenous peoples, also becomes a question of whose expertise is foregrounded. The outcome affects what and how the source communities are represented.

## 7.2.2 A QUESTION OF EXPERTISE

The role expertise plays in the representation of Indigenous peoples plays a tacit role in all four of the research questions. The expertise of each figured world plays

a significant part in the narratives presented in a museum. Socially inclusive museums need to consider the idea of expert (Sandell, 2003), and how expertise can create barriers (Macdonald, 2002). The question of expertise became salient in the interview with how each curator described his or her relationship with the source communities. How curatorial expertise is shared provides a parallel with the curator and museum's role in empowering the source communities.

One curator interviewed for this research refuted that the primary role of the curator was one of being *the* "expert"; instead, he viewed his role as one of facilitation (NMA curator in interview, 2012). Other curators suggested a similar understanding as they saw their role as a tool to incorporate the voice of the source communities into the exhibit. Such values on curating concur with suggestions that a curator's role becomes more decentralized as alternative voices are encouraged to take part (Hopper-Greenhill, 1992). When alternative voices, such as the source community, are involved in the curating process, the role of relational agency and expertise begins to be defined.

The findings from the case studies showed some museum curators had structural constraints from the architecture that created challenges for designing exhibitions and stated the need to share the information with source community curators. This aligns with Dillenberg (2011) who stated design, physical space, and the embedded message were three things curators consider and become a way for museum curators to share their expertise with the source communities. The *Our Peoples* gallery at NMAI provides an example of what can happen when such collaboration breaks down (cf. section 5.1.3.1).

Different people with different styles and different messages curated the two sections; which is exactly the way it was 'read' based on comments by reviewers and my observations. What seems to have happened is a communication breakdown during the negotiation process of who held the expertise of knowledge for specific tasks; how could the museum curators aid the community curators and vice versa. The NMAI curator interviewed commented that members of the community curation teams questioned who the experts were as they had no knowledge of the physical space or putting together exhibits (Smith, in interview, 2013). He commented that such comments were part of the museum's learning curve. Actions of assuming someone from the outside inherently knows how to do things can create unneeded boundaries between the source community and the museum curators.

A different approach was taken for the community iwi exhibit at Te Papa where a Māori curator is appointed to work with the iwi members through the entire process. During the process, some concerns on the exhibitions development arose because the curatorial team wanted a more "contemporary space" while the iwi elders sought a more "conservative one"—"the elders, in this case, hold power over

the curators" (Hutoitoi in interview, 2012). The commented. Hutoitoi, the curator at Te Papa, commented that community members were "the experts, *they tell us* the stories . . . they know a lot of things we do not" (in interview, 2012, italics added). His comment correlates with discussions of "who owns the past," and resonates with political considerations of "control" (Smith, 2006, p. 52) and the empowerment of those represented. This provides an example of relational agency and expertise, and how to negotiate boundaries.

At the NMA, the concept for an exhibit begins more from the narratives provided from "working closely" with their "many contacts" in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities before objects are chosen to enhance the personal narratives (curators, in interview, 2012). Knowing what is in the collection is another tool of expertise museum curators can provide to community curators. To some degree, at the NMA the community members have a chance to drive the direction of exhibit in its consultation with the curator (in interview, 2012). Providing narratives through the voice of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders was a priority, but unlike Te Papa, the distance and expense of travel limited full community participation (an NMA curator in interview, 2012).

A similar context prevailed at Iziko South Africa Museum (ISAM) where providing the voice of the community was considered vital. Drs. Jeanette Deacon and Benjamin Smith were involved with the rock art exhibit at ISAM. Both stated the importance of having community involvement and the need for the exhibit to be heard through the voice of the San and Khoikhoi ancestors (in follow-up questionnaire, 2015). However, as with the NMA, the distance of the source communities from the museum's location in Cape Town made it difficult *if not impossible* to have community members fully involved. Thus, even if a museum's agenda promotes inclusivity, there may be factors that limit the degree it can take place. The findings from the national museum in South Africa and the NMAI also pointed to the distance between the museum and the source communities as a constraint in creating the degree of collaboration sought.

Thus, whatever the degree of collaboration, all participants spoke of a shift in how meaning was constructed: the voice of the source community took precedence over the curators.' By incorporating the interpretations of the source community, meaning making was shaped through each practice's social and cultural environment (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) and added a layer of authenticity to the narrative. This said there are other factors regarding terminology, voice, and representation that need consideration.

### 7.2.3 INDIGENOUS OR COMMUNITY CURATION

Curation is perceived through a lens that views the concept of "museum" and its practices as wrapped up in the guise of Western traditions (Lonetree, 2012, Hendry,



2005; Kreps 2005). Indigenous curation defines museological behavior for non-western methods of curating (Kreps, 2005). Therefore, based on the case studies I suggest the concept applies equally to museum curators of Indigenous heritage as they are outside their own cultural traditions when working with iwis, tribes, or clans not their own.

For these curators, the difference lies in having traditional knowledge in a collective sense, but a *lack of traditional knowledge* of the specific iwi, tribe, or clan he or she works with. Martin and Mirraboopa (2009) stated, the interrelationship between a community's way of knowing, way of being, and way of doing can only be conveyed by members of the community represented (p. 211). How the community's voice is represented answers the second part of research question four (RQ4). The previous section focused on how the curators perceived their role and expertise. This section considers the terminology, or social language, used to by the curators and the governing body regarding co-curation with source communities and how it effects *how* and *what* narratives are presented (RQ2 and RQ3).

In the follow-up questionnaire (2015), each curator was asked to define the term *Indigenous curation*. The responses placed Indigenous curation on a spectrum from being "essentialist" to "very relevant." Hutoitoti (Te Papa) wrote, "an Indigenous curator carries an added level of accountability to their people in the care and interpretation of Indigenous cultural treasures . . . it is a privileged position which carries with it great responsibility". Dr. Jeanette Deacon, curator/advisor for the rock art exhibit at ISAM, also wrote an Indigenous curator brings an "added dimension of intangible heritage and significance to the object that might affect the way in which they are stored, conserved, and displayed." At the other end of the spectrum, Sven Ouzman (ISAM) remarked, "all people are Indigenous; some just know where they are Indigenous to and the rest of us are still figuring it out." Similarly, Paul Chaat Smith (NMAI) conveyed, "the difference was the word *Indigenous*."

The last two comments refer to the ambiguity of the term and advocate asking; does the calling out of 'difference' in curatorial methods merely perpetuate cultural differences? I have gained much insight from Kreps research; nevertheless, I now question whether the term "community curation" used by the NMAI provides a more accurate and open term than 'Indigenous curation'? "Curating community" provides a term that refers to a process of curating of choosing which community participates in curating. Once determined, the community is acknowledged by its tribal affiliation. The term also removes any conflict or prejudice linked with the term 'Indigenous' and provides a sense of synthesis between the museum, its curators and the communities its represents (Sandell, 1998). It is a term that affirms community identity while promoting self-empowerment.

Both terms acknowledge *partnership*, understanding, and a change of ideology as it relates to handling, preserving, and exhibiting tangible and intangible culture. Whether the term "or 'community curation' is used, I suggest the museum's policy and mission should be implicit in the museum's position. This action would aid in defining its societal benefits and values (principals and ethics) and create social capital by "promoting tolerance and understanding within the wider society" (Sandell, 1998, p. 411). Te Papa provides an excellent example of transparency between the museum's agenda, the curator's role, and its involvement of the communities it serves. The museum advocates biculturalism and *Mātauranga Māori* (Māori scholarship); the latter based on the deep respect and sensitivity for generational knowledge or *whakapapa*.

## 7.3 INVOLVEMENT WITH SOURCE COMMUNITIES

Every museum creates a unique cultural context (Macdonald, 1996). For the national museums in this research, it is a context formulated by the museum's governing body. The two themes discussed thus far have shown how the terminology used in the museum's policy/mission influences the methods employed by curators to provide an inclusive representation of source communities. The museums that incorporated terms of inclusiveness provided exhibition narratives that shifted from a Western settlers viewpoint to a more abstract narrative that embraced tangible and intangible knowledge of the community represented. Thus, the semiotic landscape and the social landscaped merged.

The findings from the case studies established that developing *partnerships* between the museum and the source communities provided challenges: The process required more time, patience, and negotiation from all sides. Partnerships communicate a sense of working together throughout the process, and consultant signifies information and assistance are sought on a need-to-know basis. Considering each practice (the museum curator(s) and the source community curators) as a "figured world" (Holland, et al., 1998) provides a means to view the mediation communicated between how each balances the flow of information and considers what additional knowledge needs to be considered for the exhibition. The process involves active listening, and building trust: it is about the relational features of give and take. It is a complex process, which consumes more time and creates challenging communication. Research has shown such changes in curatorial methodology produce enormous satisfaction for both practices, and well worth the time and effort put into the process (Conaty and Carter, 2005).

Based on comments from curators (NMAI, Te Papa, NMA, and ISAM), collaborating with members of the source community(s) not only changed the process, it required additional considerations (time, patience, difference in protocol, and relationship development).<sup>3</sup> George F. MacDonald (2005), Director Emeritus of Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec, uses the concept of “duel voice” to reflect on the having the right voice and balance. He developed the idea after realizing the sharp contrast between his staff and the First Nation representatives with which they collaborated (pp. 46-47). Collaborating in this manner is part of the practice of being socially responsible and establishing long-term relationships. The curator at Te Papa provided a similar reflection concerning the time needed, working with communities “definitely extends the process” as “you can get contested histories with things . . . in that circumstance we might select different things because we don't want that, there is no need for that.” What was relevant to the curator was “getting the right balance” (in interview, April 2012).

An additional challenge for the museum curators is the change in how exhibitions are ‘read.’ At some point all three museums (NMAI, NMA, Te Papa) were criticized on how and what narratives were presented. The findings from the case studies indicated more conservative governments questioned the relevance of the narratives. Criticism aimed at the NMAI also came from Native Americans and non-natives questioning the abstractness of Native narratives. Te Papa received criticism that the celebratory Marae leaned too heavily towards Māori cultural and not enough to Pākehā culture. Additionally, the political implications of the controversial 2003 ‘Review’ of the NMA still linger in the national media. The need to provide the voice of the source community does not seem to be an issue with the curator’s involved in this research. I heard a concern from several curators interviewed for a need to understand the process and the outcome exhibition. One intention of using the concept of ‘figured worlds’ was an attempt for the nuances involved in the collaboration process to be made explicit; thus, providing a tool for assessment aimed to create a balance between the different voices.

Both curators I spoke with at the NMA consistently commented on the importance of providing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders voice in the exhibits. While the exhibitions moved beyond the personal narratives provided by the communities, it seemed as if the messages were ‘soft’. The NMA exhibitions did not provide the same degree of empowerment I found in the narratives presented at the NMAI or Te Papa. For example, in 2012 during my visit, there were at least three narratives related to the Stolen Generations. Signage in the *Off the Walls* exhibition for the year 2000, stated the government “denies the Stolen Generations existed”; nearby, The *Link-Up* exhibit provided a positive narrative about reconnecting Stolen Generation families, and the third exhibit, ‘I say Sorry’ located away from the other two.

The third exhibit lies in a remote corner of the lower gallery in a room full of rows of chairs facing a screen documenting Prime Minister Rudd's famous "I say Sorry" speech. Instead of the empty walls that surrounded the room, the curator's could have chosen to post the various newspaper headlines of the day along with a selection of quotes from a cross section of Australians on what that day meant to them. The film could have provided updated footage of current issues affecting Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These additions would provide a more vigorous narrative and call attention to current issues facing Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders while adding to the moral fiber of the museum.

There could be several reasons for the lack of connecting the narrative: (1) the physical location between the three exhibits within the gallery space created were disconnected; (2) each exhibit was probably planned at separate times, or (3) due to political overtones (see Article Two). Additionally, the rock art exhibit in the upper-level gallery of the NMA could have provided a substantially wider scope of its cultural significance to Indigenous Australian communities. The untold narratives related to the preservation of rock art as a cultural resource (i.e., impact of mining, natural gas plants, increasing modern infrastructure, and climate change) were missing (Article Three). Here again, the more difficult national narratives were left untold.

This differs from the NMAI that challenged people to rethink the repercussions of European conquerors on Native Americans; just the suggestion of focusing on the date 1491 holds significance for viewers to begin questioning their understanding of history. Other galleries at NMAI presented Native American life as it exists today in cities and towns—such narratives provide a sense of 'survivorship.' Likewise, the *Mana Whenua* Gallery at Te Papa stressed the importance of traditional knowledge and whakapapa to the various iwis. The curatorial methods were different at both these museums, but each museum provided a degree of empowerment for the source community who were *partners* in the curatorial process.

### 7.3.1 TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

As the findings of the case studies have shown, part of the public and media found some exhibitions too abstract; thus, they presented a narrative to difficult to 'read' or understand. In some instances, it seems the voice emanating from the exhibitions needed to be understood in the context of the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples. Traditional ways of knowing connect heritage and identity (Smith and Akagawa, 2009); however, they have been disregarded by mainstream Westerners as subjective and not holding value or truth (Walter and Andersen, 2013). Within traditional knowledge, artifacts signify traditions, ideas and customs through the stories they convey, the performances they are part of, and the relationship they establish between people and place. Often these aspects are more important than the

object itself (Clifford, 1997; Fienup-Riordan, 2003; Kreps 2009; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013). Two of the primary case studies (Te Papa, NMAI) and the rock art gallery at Iziko South African Museum emphasized ‘living’ narratives. For many Indigenous peoples, tangible objects are considered to be living entities that continue to provide "diachronic communication" between the present and past generations (Scorch and Hakiwai, 2014).

Based on my observations and comments from reviews of the exhibitions at Te Papa and the NMAI, traditional knowledge transformed narratives away from an abundance of textual elements towards abstract visuals. Colors and light were used to emphasize the importance of an object or particular area. The shift to visual elements removes the objectification of objects as part of a "collection" to an object as a personal cultural narrative. I suggest many of the comments of exhibits being “abstract” derive from this shift. The traditional knowledge gained in community curation promotes narratives of generational history, spiritual connection, and ownership removing the impersonal documentation of a date, location found, and museum classification number.

The iwi exhibition at Te Papa in 2012 provides an example: the Tainui iwi's creation story was told in a dark circular room where audio-visual effects played a significant role in narrating the story that unfolded through the voice of an elder speaking to a small young boy first in Māori and then in English. It emphasized the importance of traditional knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. An exhibition at the NMAI took a similar approach, *Our Universes*, where eight community galleries conveyed their cultural worldviews and philosophies related to the creation of the universe. The significance of the exhibit showed distinct differences and commonalities of each tribal community while conveying the importance of traditional knowledge today. Oral narratives are qualities of the new museology where museums broaden their horizons with different forms of meaning to create a shift in attitudes. Creating identity, instilling confidence and empowering marginalized groups are crucial aspects for curatorial consideration. Peter Jenison (Seneca) explains:

*The concept in the white world is that everyone's culture is everyone else's. That is not really our concept. Our concept is there were certain things given to us that we have to take care of and that you are either part of or you are not part of (in Kreps, 2009, p. 204).*

Empowerment comes through transformative processes that can reshape culturally available resources of representation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Providing accurate histories can only occur through *empowering source communities to become* ‘curating communities’ whom are involved in all phases of creating an exhibit from planning through to opening day ceremonies. In becoming a curating

community in collaboration with the museum curators, the two practices (figured worlds) *have the possibility* of being bound together in a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. In turn, their actions emphasize the degree of self-awareness, commitment to the social capital, and level of learning energy they are committed (Wenger, 2000). As the curating community and the museum curators are situated in different 'figured worlds', their own expertise becomes a mode of engagement and empowerment. Learning is situated in the action of participation and negotiation, and is mediated by the different perspectives each community brings to the table (Wenger, 2000) to achieve their goal (Edwards, 2010).

In empowering source communities, empowerment extends to the museum as an organization and outwards to the public *if the narratives reflect* national histories that have long been silenced. Therefore, the museum has an opportunity to be an active agent in changing how the nations' history is represented. One means of empowerment comes from creating exhibition narratives that challenge current thinking about cultural identities, national history and stimulate more questions than answers. Another is seeing the interconnected nature of different elements in the museum (Sandell, 2003). Of the three museums in the primary case study, and based on the installment of recent exhibitions, The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) provides a good example of a museum's whose agenda is aligned with its practices, and one that continues to learn past mistakes to reconsider how it presents narratives.

### 7.3.1.1 Parallels in Ways of Knowing

The two parallel studies provide different angles on other ways of knowing and intangible heritage. Rock art is protected in many parts of the world under UNESCO's World Heritage. It represents a significant portion of humankind's expression from prehistory to modern times. Despite this, it seems to escape the mindsets of curatorial teams in national museums (Article Three). The curator at Te Papa discussed the importance and power of rock art to Māori and the fact that while the original narratives may have changed with time, they still provide much meaning, and it is that continued connection that is important today (Hutoitoi in interview, 2012). Similarly, Article Three points to challenges of how dominant Western concepts in Australia stimulated a debate because some Aboriginals Australians were re-painting rock art sites in 'non-traditional ways.' From a Western context, they were destroying the ancient images, but for the Aboriginal custodians, the importance was to maintain the *cultural practice and meaning* that came from repainting. Thus, it was the physical act of preserving that provided a continuance of cultural meaning and kept the value of the images alive (Smith, 2004). In both instances, intangible superseded tangible contexts and conveyed the value and importance of accepting the various aspects of history as viable forms within museology. The second example illustrates unequal power relations between Western archaeologists and Indigenous people. I concur with Laurajane Smith's

(2004) concern that "what is done with Indigenous heritage must be done with the full, frank and informed consent of Indigenous people" (p. 15).

The Toy Museum article (Article One) also presents the missing narratives of children's connection to their toys as another means of marginalization and museums placing values on the word of an adult or collector over the user and member of a cultural group within society. Children play with toys and create interpretations that are quite different from an adult. The article points out children produce ingredients for narratives through framing their cultural interpretations and imaginings. I observed this when two young children became very animated and conversational with one another while pointing to various objects in a LEGO exhibit. Thus, it provides a direct parallel to intangible narratives instilled in the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

### 7.3.2 SUMMARY

In summary, the third theme discussed the voice of the source community. If source communities are participating fully in the curation process, there is an increase in the museum's social capital, and it provides self-empowerment while breaking down boundaries. Based on the findings from this research, I believe the terminology used in the policies distinguishes how the museum portrays its relationship and identity with its employees and the source communities. This agrees with Ginsburg and Mairesse (1997) who stated, "missions are at the root of the New Museology" (p.21).

Identities are both social and personal (Edwards, 2010) and create a form of agency that is cultural and established in an environment. The *environment*, in this instance, is a national museum where the museum's *cultural artifacts*, are collectively formed by the governing body and act as tools for *mediation* (Holland et al., 1998). If the policies promote an inclusive environment *that* presents a national history from a diversity of voices, its social capital increases. If on the other hand, the museum chooses to continue status quo representation of its history, it stifles learning, continues to perpetuate the same history, and continues to silence the communities that have been silent for far too long. The source community is viewed as its own *figured world*, but when combined with the figured worlds of the governing body and the museum curator they become interconnected through the mission statement and the exhibition as cultural artifacts and tools for mediation.

## 7.4 PROVIDING A BALANCE OF VOICES

The three themes afforded various forms of communication that were narrowed down to one theme of 'voice.' The findings show the dominant voice is the museum as an institution, heard through the policy and mission statements developed by the governing body. The question then returns to, how does this voice influence the meaning making process between the museum's governing body, its curators, and its source communities.

This section aims to segment the various 'voices' using theoretical aspects of cultural historical activity theory and social semiotics as described in Chapter Four. The discussion places the themes within the three 'figured worlds' (Holland et al., 1998) and examines the cultural artifacts that act as mediation tools that influence the curators. The goal is to provide a means to answer the remaining research questions and accomplish the aim of the thesis: to understand how these multiple voices influence the *curator's* process of meaning making in exhibits representing the nation's Indigenous peoples.

The concept of *figured worlds* helps to understand the "situatedness of identity in collectively formed activities" (Holland et al., 1998, p.40); specifically ones that increase participation and agency in socially produced culturally constructed activities (i.e., developing museum exhibitions). Each figured world is the product of such a construct. A board member is chosen or chooses to accept a position, a curator applies for and is hired into a specific role, and the source community accepts a role working with the museum curators: each practice is situated within a particular social position (Holland et al., 1998). All three are specific roles acted out in three different forms of culturally and socially constructed activities. Additionally, all three worlds may have different concepts for the *object* of an exhibition; thus, whose voice is heard or how they become blended is important. The following quote places multivoicedness (Wertsch, 1993) at the center of what action develops between various worlds. Ronald Inden (1990) defines human agency as:

*The power of people to act upon their world and not only know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. The capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively in interrelationships with one another to remake the world in which they live in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view (in Holland et al., 1998/2003, p.42).*



Table 7.1 Social Language used within the multivoicedness of the three figured worlds

Themes	NMAI	Te Papa	NMA
<b>Governing bodies</b> (L2)	Museum different 'Survivance'	Biculturalism Mātauranga Māori	Rich & Diverse stories
<b>Curators</b> (L3)	Native voice - Native knowledge	Mana taonga Mātauranga Māori	Indigenous Australian voices & stories
<b>Source community</b> (L4)	Community curation & partnership	Living cultures Partnership	Consultant

Table 7.1 provides the key terms used in the three themes discussed in the first three sections. It shows a consistency in the use of terminology between the themes from the governing body to the source communities. Placing each *voice* within a *figured world* creates an understanding of how the mediated action between each world forms a link between the cultural, institutional, and historical context it occurs (Wertsch, 1998).

The forming of *identities* within each figured worlds takes place in a “social landscape” (a museum as an institution in this case) through time and are dependent on the groups involved in the field of activity and how they work with others (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 285). This places the museum as an institution entwined in the context of a *social landscape* and a *semiotic landscape*.

#### 7.4.1 A CHOICE OF TERMINOLOGY

The cultural tools (i.e., policy, mission statements, narratives, exhibitions) that provide meditational means are situated culturally, historically, and institutionally (Wertsch, 1998). The findings of this research document the differences between the three national museum's stems from their governing documents. Thus, the first figured world was the museum's governing body whose *cultural artifact* became the mission statement and the policy. The findings pointed to the inclusiveness of a museum were initiated in the terminology used in Government Act that formulated it. However, the actual mission statements and policies often differed from the Acts. The National Museum of Australia (NMA) provides an example.

The Pigott Report (1975) specified, “The museum should display controversial issues” to stimulate “doubt and thoughtful discussion” (p. 4). However, the museum’s opening was criticized for exactly that. Many of the exhibitions were too provocative for the conservative government looking down its nearby perch, so a “Review” of the museum’s exhibitions (Carroll Report, 2003) was conducted, and the Director’s contract was not renewed. The Director at the time was an Australian Aboriginal woman and who *wanted* the exhibits to “startle or disturb” (Casey, 2007, p. 297). The *Review* provided a vision of the nation based on the dominant society (Hansen, 2005), which did not necessarily include all of Australia’s diverse communities.

After analyzing the data on Te Papa and the NMAI, the use of the NMAs term ‘*consultant*’ to describe the museum’s relationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders seems to suggest the museum had not completely embraced the concepts of the new museology. By consistently using the term *consultant*, the museum’s governing body situates the museum within a specific context that dodges providing an inclusive landscape. It perpetuates how values of the dominant society are transferred to those working within the museum as an institution (Holland et al, 1998, p. 26). This in turn has implications for how mediation between the museum and the Indigenous communities, especially given their negative perception of museums as collectors and objectification of them in exhibits (Macdonald, 1998; Martin and Miraboopa, 2009; Smith, 2012; Lonetree, 2012; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013).

Of the three primary case studies, the NMAI seems to provide the best example of a blending of voices throughout *all areas* of the museum. In the 2013 interview with Paul Chaat Smith, he mentioned how instrumental the concepts and ideas of Richard W. West (acting Director from 1990-2007) and Kevin Gover (current Director) were to the curators. Smith was the *only* curator to comment on the relationship between his position as curator and the agendas set by the Directors. The NMAI consistently walks the talk. They provide a landscape for the Native voice—an environment Native Americans can consider a Native place. It is the only museum investigated where Native communities were involved in *all* the museum processes. Empowerment came from the voice of the Director that the museum would work with all Native American communities to present a “living culture.” Unlike, the NMA I did not detect a power play of the dominant Western society. The NMAs governing documents embrace working together across boundaries. The voice emitted from these documents, as cultural artifacts, effect the relationship between the museum curators and the community curators in what and how narratives are presented. How the various voices merge dictates the message the museum provides: in other words, there is a relational agency between the three figured worlds. The relational agency places emphasis on *working together* to interpret the problem, and then collaborating to act on and solve it (Edwards, 2010).

The *figured world of the curators* is situated in the social and cultural context of the museum (Holland et al., 1998). The terminology used in the interviews by the curators to discuss how they work with source communities affords links to the museum's policy (Table 7.1). Two museums placed *partnership* at the fore (NMAI and Te Papa) and did so in similar means; it went beyond the curator's relationship with the source communities to the diversity of their staffs. Both the NMAI and Te Papa employ a high percentage of Native Americans or Māori on their curatorial teams, and value traditional knowledge in their curating methods (Native Voice, Native knowledge, and Mātauranga Māori). This action creates a "collective competence" (Edwards, 2010, p.35) and sets the stage for the degree the voice of the source community is incorporated in the process of creating an exhibition.

The inclusion of the voice of traditional knowledge would suggest the narratives presented would be more representative of the community represented. However, the results of the case study on the NMAI suggested the process was more complex because even though the narratives are authentic, they are not necessarily representative of *the narratives* other members of the source community would present (*cf.* Lonetree, 2006; Atalay, 2006). Thus, based on Wenger's (1998, 2000) concept of community practice, the identity of the community curator's did not become as strong as it could have due to the boundaries and levels of expertise between the community curators and the museum curators. Boundaries are situated where competence and experience converge and expose unknown expertise. This generates an important aspect for learning (Wenger, 2000), where the challenges of boundaries create new possibilities.

This raises research questions (RQ3 and RQ4) on the use of the terms *partnership*, *consultant*, and *curating community* and how it relates to the voice presented in exhibition narratives. Amy Lonetree (2012) and other Indigenous researchers have commented they (Indigenous people) are the ones who need to tell their history as they know it and as it has been communicated to them. The findings suggest this does not *fully* take place via a community curator's role as a *consultant* but does through a partnership that develops a deep relationship over time. The curator at Te Papa referred to time, trust, and due diligence as being crucial to establishing long-term relationships, as did Gerald Conaty and Beth Carter (2005) in working with the Blackfoot<sup>2</sup> communities near Calgary. Relational agency was clearly presented in both these instances as both examples highlight the give and take necessary to establish healthy relationships.

In viewing the governing board, the curators, and the source communities as situated in individual *figured worlds* allows a process to discern similarities and differences across boundaries and what meditational means are needed to break them down. The terminology in governing documents, as cultural artifacts, provide the starting point for negotiating those boundaries. As cultural artifacts, the governing documents become a "symbol of culture" and of the "ethical

responsibility" of the museum (Sandell, 2007, p.193). To the extent the terms influence exhibition spaces, they become "semiotic resources" used as tools of communication guiding how and what such spaces represent (van Leeuwen, 2005, p.3). As semiotic resources, they influence how meaning is made.

The museum curator's expertise of the 'objects' in a museum's collection and the exhibition spaces are considered cultural artifacts. The source communities offer another form of expertise, another way of knowing, based on traditional knowledge passed down through generations in oral narratives. These narratives emphasize intangible constructs of meaning. Combined the resources of the two curating practices influence and construct the narratives for the exhibit. Thus, the second question which asks what voices influences the curator's representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples begins to be answered.

### 7.4.2 NARRATIVES AND AUDIENCE

The third research question (RQ3) pertains to how narratives are presented and whom the *curators* consider their audience. The content of the exhibition narrative is influenced by the amount of information a curator receives from the community curators. While terminology (consultant, partner) provides an influence on both curatorial teams, another influence comes from each 'figured world' having a different knowledge base—even if the museum curator is of Indigenous heritage. This points to relational agency between the museum curators and the source community curators where both worlds need to be able to recognize when their expertise is needed *and* when to bring in the expertise from the other side (Edwards, 2010). To what extent this happens is dependent on the amount of trust established and what boundaries might still exist between the two.

The results of this research show the curation process is complicated. It involves time and negotiation; however, for a change to occur rules often need to be twisted to create new ones to move forward (Edwards, 2010). This suggests the curators may need to maneuver around the governing policies to promote the voice of the source community. When both curatorial teams understand their practice as a figured world, they begin to know how to negotiate and move forward together (Edwards, 2010). The relational agency between the museum curators and the source community curators reflects back on the institutional directives established by the governing body.

Additionally, the directives establish who is considered the museum's main audience (i.e., exhibition narratives, museum's location, entry fees, special programs). The Indigenous galleries at Te Papa place a specific focus on a Māori audience and the NMAI places emphasis on the communities represented while understanding the majority of its audience is not Native American. For the communities represented, the focus provides empowerment and further establishes

each community's identity within society. However, the creation of exhibitions for specific Indigenous audiences creates challenges for how a Western audience 'reads' the exhibition. A change in exhibition style occurs: The textual information that usually accompanies artifacts has been replaced by personal narratives and a more visual, albeit abstract, means of 'reading' (Cobb, 2005a; Rickard, 2007; Lonetree, 2012).

This research has shown the difference in knowledge systems creates abstract exhibits. Compositional terminology such as framing, informational value, and salience take on different connotations—as these terms were devised in a Western context (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The use of modes such as color and lighting may construct meaning differently to influence different contexts being represented. These also become cultural tools for mediation of how the exhibit is presented (i.e., the community Marae at Te Papa). The actions of each figure world are in and of themselves semiotic resources as they govern the museum's internal and outward communication (van Leeuwen, 2005).

### 7.4.3 STATUS QUO OR EMPOWERMENT

The final question (RQ4) asks if curating with source communities changes the narratives from status quo to providing self-determination. In the Literature review, I discussed how history books used in secondary education present a lop-sided portrayal of *nation*. This combined with museum directives creates an aspect of learning where the curators and source communities can play an important role. How they choose to present, frame, and link exhibition narratives can either implement change on how "nation" is perceived or maintain the status quo. Such a change would include narratives presenting the identities and histories of peoples who have previously been silenced (Sandell, 2000, 2003, Macdonald, 2003).

The placement of an object/artifact *in* an exhibition can reflect cultural significance with the choice of what is highlighted, the spatial layout, and the colors chosen. If the same object were given to each curator involved in this research, more than likely, each one would place it in a different specific semiotic context. How he or she chose to interpret its meaning would be grounded in each curator's academic or traditional value systems (Wertsch, 1991). The act of representation is complex. It arises from the social, cultural and psychological of the sign-maker, the curator in this case, and the particular context used, which suggest the artifact is only *partial* represented (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996).

Te Papa curator, Hutoitōi, stated, he deferred expertise to the curating community when two different visions for the exhibit developed (in interview April 2012). Although both Hutoitōi and the curating community are Māori, they did not share the same iwi so the knowledge of the artifacts and the context of them were deferred to the community. This process involved negotiation, and a give and take

between the two parties. Vygotsky suggests, learning comes from the mediation involved in such an activity—curator(s) choice of an object (as a tool) and placing it within a specific context—has key importance for changing social conditions, i.e., what history is being told through the narratives. Context is integrated in several ways; (1) interaction between curators and ‘community curators’ takes place within certain cultural conditions that reflect how communication takes place and the meditation that develops from it; and (2) positioning of exhibit, its composition, and its relation to the narrative, which is a direct outcome of the first point. In the example provided, it is important to remember the primary audience for the iwi exhibition is that specific iwi, which was also the curating community. The context for the composition and narrative of the exhibition evolved from the mediation between Hutoitōi and the curating iwi community.

Transformative processes, such as these take place when museum curators work with source community ‘curators’ to help reshape culturally available resources of representation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Providing accurate histories can only occur through *empowering source communities* to become ‘curating communities’ that are involved in all phases. While the educational department within a museum has a role to collaborate with curators, it is the curators and their teams who develop the exhibits, decide what narratives, and voice is presented. A Native voice speaks directly to how Indigenous cultures are represented, while empowerment comes from a healthy relationship and provides for a better understanding of Indigenous cultures (McMaster, 2011; Smith, 2012; Hays-Gilpin and Lomatewama, 2013).

Empowerment in this sense moves beyond the source community to include the museum's public, the curators involved, the museum's stakeholders, and the national consciousness *if the narratives reflect* the nations' diverse history (Sandell, 2000; Sandell, 2003). Thus, the museum has an opportunity to be an active agent in changing curriculum in educational systems to include the nations' history as it actually happened. It is about creating narratives that challenge current thinking about cultural identities, national and natural history, and providing narratives that raise more questions than they answer. However, change requires Directors, curators, and other museum workers to develop personal agency and assume responsibility for what they believe (Sandell, 2003; Marstine, 2011; Janes, 2014; McCall and Gray, 2014).

The National Museum of the American Indian provides such an example, although the exhibition narratives are not without fault, the museum is listening to its critics and making positive changes. The findings showed that many narratives presented in all three museums represented in the case studies neither provoked or challenged national histories: thus, opportunities for change were missed. Even when an Indigenous voice was presented, the pitch seemed softer and more tentative than

self-empowering. Possibly this is because expertise was not shared, or because the museum's agenda provided boundaries on what narratives could be offered.

Understanding each curatorial team as a *figured world* provides an individual identity for each to consider how the museum, as an institution, operates with and against the "structural histories" of the identities they inhabit (Holland et al., 1998, p.5). Identities, be it the governing board, curators, or source community, are always under negotiation where new means of mediation can surface (Edwards, 2010). The interconnection between the individual identities (three figured worlds) relates to the *shared activity* of achieving their *common goal*—an accurate representation of the community in an exhibition. To the degree sharing of expertise takes place is dependent on what boundaries need to be mediated and what tools are used to accomplish it. In other words, the terminology used by the governing body influence the starting point for community curator(s) to work with the museum curator(s), and how the terminology is interpreted suggests what boundaries need to be negotiated (See Figure 2.3).

The following section presents a means to analyze the mediation, boundaries, and relational agency between figured worlds to broaden this research. A limitation of this study was having the time and opportunity to observe the actual process between the museum curators and the source communities, establish what boundaries existed, and how they were mediated. Based on the findings and that of other researchers, the following provides a possible model to be used for such research. A focus places emphasis on CHAT; however, the concepts regarding an exhibition's semiotic landscape could also be observed and understood through the various mediational processes involved in developing the exhibit.

#### 7.4.4 ZONE OF MEDIATING KNOWLEDGE (ZMK)

Vygotsky (1978) developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to illustrate the distance in problem solving between what a student could do on his or her own versus what he or she could do in collaboration with a more proficient peer or adult to achieve a higher degree of learning. Vygotsky pointed to three key areas: (1) social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development, (2) MKO, the more knowledgeable other, or anyone with a better understanding or higher skill set than the learner, (3) ZPD is the distance between a student's ability to perform a given task under guidance and doing it independently, this is the learning zone. Doris Ash and her colleagues (2006, Ash, et al., 2012) incorporated ZPD within the scope of museum educators in science museums and visitor learning.

During this research, the concept of ZPD kept returning to me inspiring the development of several configurations. I saw a direct connection between the social and semiotic landscape. However, none ever conveyed what I envisioned was taking place between the narratives were told versus those that were not in the

exhibitions. My mind continually brought me back to the relationship between curators and source communities, and the then to overriding terminology used by the museum and curators. It was not until the very last phase of research that a useable configuration was developed with some of tweaking to Vygotsky's original ZPD concept. At this time, the model is used for the analysis of figured worlds of the museum curators and the community curators, although, I envision the influence terminology used by the museum's governing body would be part of the outcome.

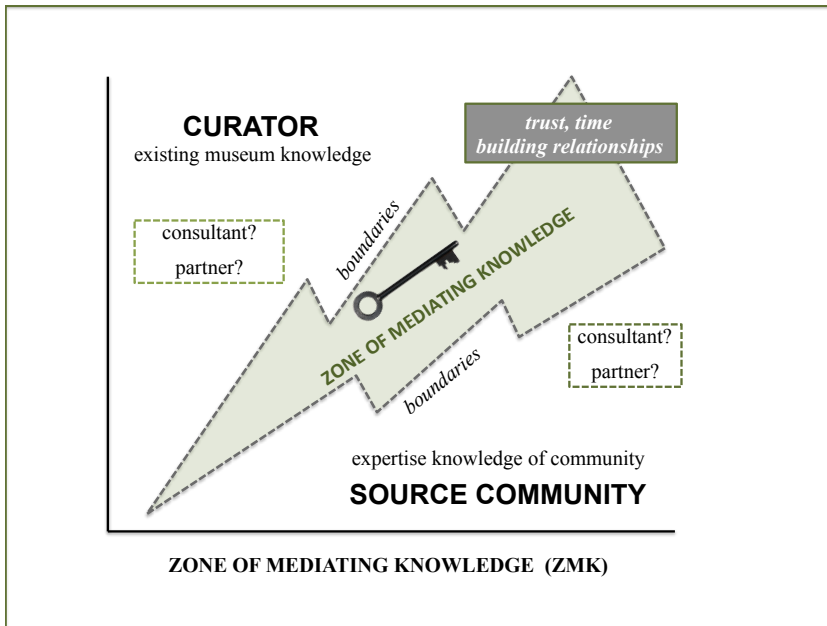


Fig. 7.2 Zone of Mediating Knowledge (ZMK) developed by the author.

The ZMK or Zone of Mediating Knowledge (Fig. 7.2) provides a means of viewing the boundaries, mediation, trust, and relationships between museum curators and source community curators. It looks at the *process* between the 'figured worlds' (Holland et al., 1998). The development of ZMK is based on empirical research and information provided from the interviews with the curators who participated in this research. Museum curators are represented on the left side of the figure and source communities on the right: with each figured world having different levels of expertise and knowledge systems. The museum curator has knowledge about the museum's mission and agenda; their own field of expertise; physical space and contacts; museum's collection, and contact with source communities. The source community has historical and contextual knowledge of their culture: another way of knowing. Contextual knowledge includes traditional knowledge of handling, spiritual implications, and narratives connecting generations over long periods. It is a form of knowledge not necessarily known by the museum curator even if he or



she is an Indigenous person. Mediating between the two forms of knowledge creates the Zone of Mediating Knowledge and is dependent on the breaking down boundaries and to establish trust.

From a CHAT perspective, the ZMK provides a means for each practice to use tools developed from their own socio-cultural environments or toolboxes. However, in this context, I suggest the historical context of 'museums' as viewed by Indigenous peoples creates the first boundary to eliminate. The jagged edge of the zone represents such boundaries. Borders can be both positive and negative. They can create a fear that might prohibit or restrict change, or they can suggest a means for reflection of new possibilities, which in turn liberate (Sandell, 2003; Janes, 2016). Whether the museum uses the term curatorship or partnership may also be a boundary to overcome as each term conveys a different degree of involvement. What narrative, which objects, display methods, and governing documents are also potential boundaries. Recalling Wenger (2000), boundaries are necessary learning systems that create interaction between communities to expose what competence is missing. It is also in this sense that boundaries can create social capital, which develops from a sense of commitment and trust the community can contribute and reciprocate (Wenger, 1998).

The 'key' image in the ZMK signifies the object bringing the two figured worlds together, in this case, the development of an exhibit representing some aspect of the source community's culture. What dialogic process develops between the two practices creates the degree of mediation in sharing of each other's expertise. The figured worlds each have their own "socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 52). The interrelationship between the museum curator(s) and the source community's curator(s) becomes significant to explain how each side gains expertise in each other world. It is a process of constant give and take.

The degree of learning that occurs between the two parties centers on this activity relates to relational agency, or the asking for help (Edwards, 2010). Learning from this viewpoint centers on how people play out their identities within society—in this case as figured worlds—and how they are negotiated. Relational agency provides a means to unpack the object of activity (creating the exhibit) and keep it fluid as it changes between the give and take of mediation between the two practices. As each practice joins in interpreting the object, a process of internalization and externalization is allowed to take place. The more this process takes place, the more knowledge is gained, and the more boundaries are broken down.

Expertise is accomplished through making visible what is important for each practice and the negotiation of that arises from problems in what others suggest. It

is working together to interpret the problem and collaborating as a means to solve it (Edwards, 2010). How messages are embedded, by whom and for whom, relates to curators and museums being socially responsible to creating agendas that meet the demands of today's complex society and further the plight of its nations' marginalized peoples. It may help define to what degree *consultancy* versus *partnership* with source communities differs. It could also be used the same way between the governing board and the museum curators to understand the implications the museum policies present on the exhibition's narratives.

The ZMK model can be used as a tool for analysis in several ways:

- (1) As a casual discussion between the museum curators and the source community curators to better understand what part of the process worked and which parts did not. The concern would be how objective and open would each party be about what took place;
- (2) An outside consultant(s) would observe the action and language between the various parties during as much of the entire process of designing an exhibition as possible. This includes a follow-up after the completion, which would involve an open discussion as suggested in number one; and
- (3) It could also be an initial training tool to establish a collaborative framework between practices about expectations, possible boundaries, levels of expertise, and the time and patience needed to establish trust. After the exhibition process was completed, it could be used as framework for debriefing. An outside consultant(s) would be suggested to keep the discussion objective.

The aim of this thesis was to figure out what voices influence a curator's representation of the nation's Indigenous peoples and what implications it has for meaning making. Moving from a social landscape to a semiotic one provides a process of understanding the how the production of compositional considerations of the exhibition are mediated (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996): such a process is a means of communication. Research has shown different forms of knowledge place different meanings on semiotic resources (objects, modes such as light, color, text), on what is salient, how exhibits and objects within them are 'framed,' and the informational value presented. The mediation process, the give and take of expertise, provides a lens into the transformations of sign making that occur within the social process (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The social action in this process changes both actors (Edwards, 2005, 2010; Holland et al., 1998) and the engagement of the two communities becoming bound together offers learning opportunities (Wenger, 1998, 2000).

## 7.5 IMPLICATIONS

Within museology, there has been a call for the governing body and curators to step up and create social change to make a difference through their actions, to be "museum different." Based on the results of this thesis I believe the terminology and actions of the museum's governing body, its influence by political affiliations set the tone for the collaboration between museum curators and source community curators, as well as the museum's structural design. The thesis showed a contrast between the three national museums (Te Papa, the NMAI, and the NMA); two refer to partnership with source communities, and one prefers "consultation." Te Papa's concept of "Mātauranga Māori" and the NMAI phrase "Native Place" and "Survivance" refer to a establishing a partnership with the source community, while the NMA mission refers to "rich and diverse stories." However, both the board and the curators at the NMA use the term 'consultant.' Additionally, Te Papa embraces New Zealand's bicultural environment, and the NMAI challenges the Western Hemisphere's representation of Native American history: the social language used by the museum suggests empowerment and self-determination. However, the terminology used by the NMA suggests it may still need to do more to challenge the governing voice in Canberra as it hints at the museum retaining a position of *authority*. These relationships affect the narratives presented, and the extent source communities are involved in working with the museum curators.

The implications of Indigenous methodologies or knowing of them provides a means to understand better the traditional way of knowing held by Indigenous peoples. It moved the focus of the thesis of curators meaning making from a singular theoretical perspective of the semiotic landscape (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) to a dual perspective that incorporated CHATs social landscape of 'figured worlds' (Holland et.al, 1998) and multivocality (Wertsch, 1991). The concept of Indigenous curation and community curation placed emphasis on another way of knowing where intangible cultural heritage prevailed over the more western context of tangible heritage: Oral narratives replaced written knowledge. This thesis provides a cross-comparative study to exemplify the differences and commonalities of 'Indigenous curation' in different national contexts. The findings suggest the political overtones of the terminology used in the museum's policies sets the tone for how a curator works with source communities *and* what narratives are presented in the exhibitions.

The results indicate that even when communities or Indigenous curators are involved, narratives continue to be interpreted as not being honest, or are presented using untraditional methods that create complex and abstract exhibitions. During the curators interview and in the information provided in follow-up questions, I was surprised at how little information was conveyed about how the exhibitions were analyzed. The fault lies partly with me, as it was not a specific question asked.

However, when the topic came up in casual conversation I got the distinct impression from all the curators that analysis was a matter of walking through the exhibit observing and listening to the public. One curator mentioned the museum used the generalized visitor feedback forms visitors fill-out before leaving, but commented that little valuable feedback came from them.

To my knowledge research on measuring a curatorial team's process as it relates to the triangular relationship between the museum policies, the aim of an exhibition and the curators collaboration with source community curators has not been developed. I believe the development of ZMK provides a beginning. Additionally, the three figured worlds discussed could be implemented within a modified activity system (Engeström, 1999) to better analyze the relational agency between the three in a broader scope. These studies would benefit from observing all stages of the process of developing an exhibit from its start-up to completion. For researchers this entails conducting observations and interviews at the different levels, sitting in on meetings, and documenting the process (visual and oral recordings) at various times during the process (Edwards and MacKenzie, 2005). These methods provide a means to elaborate on the relational aspects of mediation between the different figured worlds and the various learning that develops.

Meaning making and representation provided the main focus, with an underlying theme of social responsibility as it relates to the museum and curator's relationship with empowering source communities. During the writing process, I began to diverge on other paths (e.g., employment opportunities within museum's for Indigenous peoples as it relates to educational and political systems) but stopped before wandering too far from the aim. In the third article, emphasis is placed on political decisions by the dominant society over ownership of Indigenous lands and cultural heritage. The effects of mining and building infrastructure (i.e., railroad, highways) continue, often with very little conversation or negotiation with the Indigenous communities who own the land rock art or other cultural heritage objects (both tangible and intangible) are located. There is little respect for cultural values or voices of these communities, just as there seems to be little value in the voices of children collaborating with curators to provide narratives of their cultural heritage of toys. History, and museum's as social institutions have often presented Indigenous peoples and other marginalized people in society (including young children) without a voice. The findings show there may still be an overall lack of courage by museums to be critical of past injustices and the effect they have on all members of society, especially those who have been silenced.

Much was learned from researching the various museums presented in this thesis, yet I often felt more could have been accomplished focusing on one museum and going more in depth. Many researchers have taken that road, but in the end, I believe the added depth of a cross-comparative case study provides a lens into different curatorial methods that are not seen in single case studies.

**ENDNOTES**

1. Hansen, Erin, (2009) Indigenous Foundation, University of British Columbia, Oral Traditions, First Nations as oral societies, para.4.  
<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/oral-traditions.html>
2. (REV) Adam Goode ended his acceptance speech with the following words: “The ultimate reward is when all Australians see each other as equals and treat each other as equals. To me, everything is about people and the choices we make. I believe it is the people and the interactions between us that make this country so special. Thank you . . .” (Sharwood, 2015). Instead of cheering and congratulating him the audience overwhelming booed him.
3. Time and the establishing of a relationship are key considerations. For Gerald T. Conaty at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, the process for a Western curatorial team to integrate as ‘partners’ with a First Nation community involved much more than just having meetings; the process was one of getting to know one other at a mutual site where trust and deeper relationships could be established. The process is more time-consuming and at times frustrating due to cultural differences, but it allows for a greater flow of knowledge between the two parties (Conaty and Carter, 2005).
4. Blackfoot is a Euro-American term that encompasses the Kainai, Siksika, Amskaapiikani, and Apatohsipikani people sharing a common language and cultural practices. Each group has its own identity (Conaty and Carter, 2005, p. 56)



## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING COMMENTS

*In wisdom gathered over time, I have found that every experience is a form of exploration.*  
-Ansel Adams<sup>1</sup>

*A Curator's Representation of Indigenous Peoples: National Museums, Cultural Artifacts, Knowledge Systems* presents three case studies and two parallel studies investigating what voices influence a curator's meaning making process. The primary research focused on national museums in three contrasting countries (Australia, New Zealand, USA), while parallel studies investigated two museums in Scandinavia and one in South Africa. The findings represent comprehensive qualitative research formulated by semi-formal interviews, textual documentation, visual based research, and a broad literature review.

The data collected suggested four layers of context where influences on the curator might take place: The Architecture of the Museum (L1), the Museum as an Institution (L2), the Curator as an Exhibitor (L3), the Curator and the Source Community (L4). Each case study was presenter using these layers. The findings from the primary case studies suggested three salient themes emerged from the layers: (1) the influence from the governing bodies and the mission statement, (2) differences in curatorial approaches, and (3) the involvement of the source communities. These themes, discussed in a cross-comparative format, implied an overriding theme of *blended voices*. This theme was examined using the dual theoretical perspective of the *social landscape* of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998) and the *semiotic landscape* of the exhibition space and the composition of exhibits in it (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The process of narrowing down themes provided a foundation to answer the four research questions and achieve the aim of this thesis.

The theoretical foundation of semiotic landscape provided tools to analyze the compositional aspects of the exhibitions and the physical space surrounding them (L1, L3). The semiotic landscape can encompass the entire museum or a particular exhibition space. The semiotic resources within the landscape provide the *semiotic potential*. Compositional aspects such as *information value*, *framing*, and *salience* become the tools to analyze the landscape. Through 'reading' the various landscapes, contrasts and similarities could be seen in the architecture and exhibition space of the various museums; specifically, changes in curatorial methods of exhibiting and meaning making.

Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) considered in L2 to L4 placed the governing board, museum curators and source community curators as socially and culturally constructed “as-if” *figured worlds* (Holland et. al., 1998), where mediation between them took place using different *cultural artifacts* (mission statement, exhibition, curator). The theory suggested *relational agency* existed between the various levels. The *social language* used by the governing body in the mission statement, correlated with how the interviewed curators conveyed their role and relationship with source community members. By placing each of these practices in their own ‘world’ the influence of *multivoicedness* became more distinct.

Two environments for learning were established. The placing of semiotic resources into a representational format, such as an exhibition, affords semiotic potential or meaning; thus, it creates a learning environment within the semiotic landscape. The social landscape provides learning in the negotiation process of mediated knowledge and the sharing of expertise between two figured worlds (museum curators and source community curators). Together the two provide different angles on meaning making and influences on the curator's process of representing the nation's Indigenous peoples. At the same time, they provide a lens into a museum's implementation of new museology and the incorporation of social responsibility in its policies.

This chapter is divided into five sections: (1) Placing the research in context, (2) Achieving the aim and answering the questions, (3) Limitations of the research, (4) Significance of the research, and (5) Moving forward.

## 8.1 PLACING THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

This research has documented the complicated relationship Indigenous peoples have with museums. Museums are places where they have been objectified, researched, and had their cultural artifacts collected as curios by elite Westerners. National museum narratives need to reflect a national history that began before the landing of Columbus or Cook to encompass the nations entire technological and cultural history of the people whose ancestors have lived there for thousands of years. Establishing partnerships with source communities allow the untold narratives of the past (and present) to have a voice that resonates with their traditional knowledge and cultural history. The findings show it is a voice not all museumgoers will understand, nor that all Indigenous peoples will consider robust enough to reconstruct the injustices of the past by the nations dominant society. The process of incorporating new voices is under constant development as shown in all three of the primary cases investigated. Integrating different knowledge systems, such as traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples within museums correlates to



recognizing the need to include Indigenous methodologies in curating, in general research where applicable, and in museum policy.

## 8.2 ACHIEVING THE AIM AND ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

This thesis set out to investigate what voices influence a curator's meaning making in the process of representing a nation's Indigenous peoples. Four research questions provided the foundation to achieve the aim. The four sections that follow provide a synopsis of each question, while the fifth section clarifies the question posited in the aim.

### 8.2.1 THE “FIGURED WORLD” OF THE CURATOR

The role of ‘curator’ is complex (RQ1). The figured world of the curator is affected by his or her social and cultural context within the museum as an institution. Through association with other ‘worlds’ (i.e., source communities), the curator's world changes. Change evolves through the mediation of cultural artifacts. Chapter Three provided a modified version of the basic mediational triangle where the museum curator has the exhibit as a mediational artifact, and the object or goal is to provide an accurate narrative. Who and what the curator enlists to achieve this influence the meaning making process. The more influences or voices on the curator, the more decentralized the traditional role of the curator as ‘expert’ becomes.

The curators that participated in this study viewed their role as a “facilitator” where the source community's members held the ‘expertise’ of their culture and history. The Māori curator at Te Papa realized having knowledge of traditional Māori culture created a lack of ‘insider’ knowledge when working with community iwi different from his own: in the process, the iwi elders were the expert of their culture. I suggest this insider-outsider position questions whether the term “Indigenous curation” is apt, and that possibly using the NMAI's term of “community curator” is more inclusive. The term (partner or consultant) used by a curator to describe his or her role was connected back to the museum's policy, which in turn influenced the curator's process of exhibiting. Thus, how each curator described his or her position and responsibility was aligned with the museum's agenda. Two of the museums (NMAI, Te Papa) incorporated a traditional form of knowledge (“Indigenous museology” and “Mātauranga Māori and mana taonga”) into the museum's policy, which influenced how the curators defined their role, worked within the museum, and collaborated with curating communities.

The physical space of the museum (L1) provided another influence on how the curators created exhibits. The building as a semiotic landscape provided a *physical*

canopy where the composition of the interior space added to the complexity of the curator's role through juxtaposed angles and distant locations for the Indigenous galleries. The proximity of a narrative in one exhibition in relationship to others held implications for possible conflicts with political narratives (NMA) and the level of shared expertise between the museum curators and the community curators (NMAI). The historical building structure of *Den Gamle By* influenced the presentation of historically themed exhibits where toys were in the context of a bourgeois society versus the dominant agricultural society of early 1900 Denmark. However, the semiotic landscape and how the curators used it were reflected by each museum's policy. Knowing the physical constraints and possibilities of the exhibit space and understanding the museum's agenda are two ways the museum curator can extend their expertise to the source communities they work with.

### 8.2.2 A QUESTION OF TERMINOLOGY

The choice of terminology used by the governing body (L2) and the curator's (L3) plays a vital role in answering RQ2. The question raised concerns about the use of terms such as partnership, consultant, and curating communities used in a museum's mission statement and policy. It also questioned if the language used by the curator paralleled the governing body and if it influenced how he or she worked with the source communities. The interview transcripts and my observations suggested narratives presented under the term *partnership* were more authentic to the source community represented than those under the term *consultant* were. It is an observation that I realize as being subjective—however, the observation was supported by scholarly articles and press clippings that reviewed the exhibitions. I believe the term *partnership* evokes a more inclusive relationship with the source community, but as the Evidence exhibit at NMAI showed, the term does not necessarily mean the relationship is as collaborative as the term implies. Additionally, the curators at NMA continual spoke of visiting the various Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as it was their voice they chose to present—not their own—even though the Indigenous communities were considered *consultants*. It was only from the analysis of the exhibition narratives and the curator's view of his or her role that the difference between the two terms became salient. The narratives at NMAI and Te Papa took on a more Native voice, as they provoked more thought, even if the presentations were more abstract and visual. Findings suggest the terminology used by the museum's governing body *influences* how the curators address their relationship with the source communities.

Most of the curators did not question the term Indigenous curation; however, I believe its use instead of 'community curation' becomes suspect of another way the museum continues to have a *voice* of power and dominance. Initially, I was a bit taken aback by the NMAI curator's response in the follow-up questionnaire that the concept of Indigenous curation was "existential." In the end, I think he makes a

valid point, as I now question whether the term perpetuates the classification of Indigenous peoples as Other. I have no definitive answer for this. It is a question that could be rectified through understanding the process of curation using the model of the Zone of Mediation Knowledge (ZMK).

In addition to the three suggestions for the use of ZMK model in section 7.4.4, I suggest its implementation in museum research could provide more insight on the perception and implications of the various terms used by the museum. It could also be used to understand the mediation and relational process between the governing body's cultural artifacts and the representation of the source community(s) in the museum environment (L2 and L4).

### 8.2.3. A QUESTION OF NARRATIVES AND AUDIENCE

Curators are central in the narratives presented in museums, and where implicit learning stems not just from what is presented, but also through the process of curators work with source communities and the audience they chose to focus on (RQ3). The findings indicate the museum curators who work more inclusively with the source community created exhibits foremost for the community being represented, and secondly for the general public (NMAI, Te Papa). Previously I suggested there was a gray zone between the narratives provided and the terminology associated with working with the source community. Adding the intended audience into the equation of representation and meaning making provides a more distinct contrast between the terms. Both the Māori curator and iwi community members as curators designed the iwi exhibit (*Te timu tai pari Tainui: Journey of a People*) specifically for Māori. The iwi curators were involved in the entire process, including verification of the completed exhibit by iwi elders before it opened to the public. The result was an exhibition with less text, more visuals, and specific narratives of a particular iwis history and culture. It provided a different way of knowing, one of traditional knowledge systems, not Western ones. Te Papa provided a comparison to the narratives presented at the NMAI that were presented from the voice of Australia's Indigenous people by the museum curators, yet somehow they lacked the same impact. I suggest the difference was the *total involvement* of the iwi curators alongside the Maori curator from Te Papa. Somewhere in between the two, the NMAI 'Evidence' exhibit left community curators asking where the 'experts' were to help them with the actual activity of exhibiting. In this example, the museum curator's expertise was not shared; thus, even though NMAI uses the term 'community curators' and policy suggests a *full involvement* of the community it seems in this instance partnership leaned more towards consultation.

### 8.2.4 THE ROAD TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Collaboration with source communities was not a straightforward process. Findings showed time, building trust, establishing relationships, patience, sharing of expertise, and full involvement moved the experience from one as a consultant to one as a partner. The findings show that of the three primary case studies, a full partnership provides the source communities with more empowerment and self-determination. Based on this research, when a source community is empowered in the curatorial process the narratives in the exhibits no longer reflect history from a Western perspective. In turn, it increases the social capital of the museum (RQ4).

The concept of *figured world* viewed the source community as its own social and constructed realm of interpretation. When placed in conjunction with the figured world of the museum curator the process of negotiation between would show the relational agency involved in co-producing the activity of creating an exhibit. The *cultural artifact* or *mediational tool* for the source community becomes their cultural expertise and traditional knowledge they hold. The degree of mediation between the two worlds is dependent on the relational agency between them that enables boundaries to be broken down: how much information will the source community share with the museum and vice versa. Learning stems from the competence and experience gained when the knowledge of both 'worlds' converge and from the meditational activity involved. Empowerment, identity, and social capital become additional outcomes of the original goal of developing an exhibit that accurately represents the nation's Indigenous peoples.

## 8.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

I am aware that involving only one curator at each of the three national museums may not provide a representative image of all national museums. In hindsight, the addition of interviews with the director, board members or members of the source communities may have also affected the outcome of the findings. To incorporate this into as many case studies as provided here would not have produced a cross-comparison, but more of a thick description of one specific museum. It would have meant spending and extended amount of time at the museum, which was not possible given my adjunct teaching obligations.

However, I believe the *inter*-national scope of the thesis, the depth of data collected, and the dual theoretical approach compensates and adds to current discussions on inclusiveness within museums and its effect on the meaning making. Furthermore, it addresses museums in a national context and their establishment of social capital through its relationship with its source communities.

## 8.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

**General to the field:** This research has provided an ongoing and timely discussion on marginalization concerns within national museums and how Indigenous peoples are represented within a national context. The various cases, including the parallel studies, afford additional dialogue on museums social responsibility and the effects of new museology in practice. Parallel studies provided insight into marginalization of children in museums and representation of toys as part of their cultural heritage in toy museums, and the narratives presented in the representation of rock art in national museums. Both studies are provided in the context of a museum's role in removing past social injustices. Concluding results, lead to the ultimate influence on curators is the voice of the museum as an institution, of its directing board and the policies they establish that determine the museum's agenda. The policies, viewed as cultural artifacts, mediate the meaning making process that provides the canopy over the semiotic landscape: from the buildings design to how the museum addresses its relationship with the source community.

**Theoretical:** The main contribution of this research is in showing that learning takes place within various interrelated practices that influence curators' representation where one of the keys lies in breaking down cultural barriers, so knowledge is shared between the different layers of expertise. The process of meaning making is an aspect of learning. With the social landscape of figured worlds and compositional aspects of the semiotic landscape, the joint activity between the two curating communities (museum and source) increases the opportunity to enhance narratives through the incorporation of traditional knowledge systems. Not only does this empower Indigenous peoples, but it also increases the museum's social capital. In developing the Zone of Mediation Knowledge (ZMK), the hope is to provide a tool to analyze the mediation between the two communities (practices) and better understand what influences a curator's meaning making process. As a tool, the ZMK can help assist museum practitioners (curators, designers, educators, governing body) to understand better what type of approach is needed to work efficiently with source communities and where any shortcomings are in the process. The outcome directly affects the narratives presented in exhibits and has further implications for how those exhibits are 'read'.

## 8.5 MOVING FORWARD

Further research would include implementing and further developing the ZMK model as a tool for the analysis of the various 'worlds' within the museum and how different cultural artifacts mediate the object of activity. It would broaden the ZMK model to provide a more robust overview of the inter-relationships and their influence on narratives presented in the museum. Central to this should be the voice of the source community to define better and verify how *consultant* and *partnership*

changes or affects the narratives and empowers the community. My current position, based on this research, is museums that incorporate terms of partnership enter into a relationship with source community members in a stronger position than those who choose to refer to the relationship as consultant. I also suggest the more source communities are involved in the overall museum, the narratives of the exhibition provide not only a more accurate history but provide self-empowerment for community members and increase the museum's social capital.

In closing, it was not possible to have a full insight of the curator's role in this context. I used the interviews and follow-ups questions to provide as an objective a view as possible. I acknowledge my voice is implicated within the findings; however, in using a wide variety of textual documents as sources I have attempted to counter my voice with others so as to provide a balance between the curators and my own. The time for the thesis to end has arrived. The experience has encompassed an extended period from which I have gathered much wisdom. It has provided an exploration of myself, of cultural world's previous unknown, and has introduced me to people I would never have met otherwise. I am grateful for the journey, and the photographs, both physical and mental, I have taken during my travels will stay with me for years to come. The journey has been challenging and is bittersweet in this its final stage.

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## SUMMARY

*Marginalization, Traditional Indigenous Knowledge,  
Children's Cultural Heritage, Rock Art, & Landscapes.*

What do Traditional Indigenous knowledge, toys, rock art, and landscapes have in common? Through case studies involving seven museums on four continents, this thesis provides a comprehensive examination into these topics from different perspectives—all with the same aim: What voices influence a curators meaning making in the process of representation?

Researchers in museum studies suggest social injustice exists in working with and representing marginalized peoples. They suggest it is only when a museum has a positive influence such communities that it begins to facilitate change and moral agency by empowering the specific communities it represents.

Museums explored were located in: Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, North America and Europe. Case studies were analyzed through specific aspects of the social landscape of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and the semiotic landscape of social semiotics. The thesis findings show a museum's mission statement and policy, as a cultural artifact, plays an important role in the mediated activity that influences a curator's process of meaning making.

The commonality?

*Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage*